

A purple geometric graphic consisting of a large triangle pointing downwards, with a smaller white triangle nested inside it, creating a layered effect.

the

# INTERVIEW

*what to do...  
and HOW to say it...*

Career and Transfer Resource Center  
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**Congratulations!** You put together a great resume and they called to schedule an interview. You have the employer's attention and you need to make the most of this opportunity to shine.

This packet of information was created to guide you through the interview process by preparing you to go in and sell yourself to any employer. Think of your resume as the advertising. Your product is your skills and experience and the prospective employer is the buyer of that product. As in any other sales process, preparation is the most important step. We cannot tell you what exactly to say during the interview itself, as each interview is unique. The best way to prepare for any interview is to know your strengths and how they fit with the position you are interviewing for.

## **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

Tips to Remember:

- Know your resume well enough that you can discuss every line if necessary
- Research the company prior to your interview
- Be prepared with answers to frequently asked questions
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer about the position/company

Many employers will use your resume as a source of questions during the interview. Review your resume prior to the interview and be able to develop answers to questions that relate to your employment and educational experience listed on your resume. Be prepared to discuss gaps in employment. If called upon, you must be able to demonstrate the skills you stated on your resume. Focus your answers on the skills and experience that will be most useful to the position you are interviewing for.

Researching the company you are interviewing with and the position you are pursuing demonstrates genuine interest and initiative. It will be obvious to the interviewer whether you did your research or not. Many interviewers will focus questions on finding out how much preparation you did for the interview.

You can research a company utilizing many different sources:

- The Internet
- Company brochures and year end statements
- The area Chamber of Commerce
- Networking – ask friends, relatives, teachers, social and business contacts

You do not need to know everything possible about the company. The information most helpful for the interviewing process includes knowing the product manufactured or service offered. You should find out the size of the company and if they have multiple locations. Who are their competitors? Did they recently merge with another company? What is their sales volume and is that down or up from previous years?

When employers/interviewers were asked about the most common mistakes made in various interviews, their responses were: not being prepared for the interview and not knowing much about the company or industry.

Do not forget the most obvious research, simply knowing where you are going BEFORE the interview. What is the company address? How long should you plan for travel time? Drive by the company to be sure that you know how to get there and how long it will take. Also, remember to give yourself an extra 10-15minutes in case they ask you to complete their job application.

Other tips on preparing for your interview:

- Consider how the position relates to your talents and goals, such as specialty area and opportunities for advancement..
- Find out the name and position of the person you will meet with and get his/her telephone number in case an emergency arises.
- Be prepared with answers to why you want to work at that particular organization, and how you would be the best candidate for this position. Understanding the company, their mission and their environment will help you with these questions.
- Dress properly for the interview. Ask your program instructor or Career Services for advice on what is appropriate for your career field.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- **The Informational Interview:** Typically this is an interview set up at your request with a Human Resources Manager or a departmental supervisor in the career field you are interested in. The purpose of this interview is for you to find out more about a particular career, position or company. You are seeking information from these people in hopes that they might refer you to someone else in their company or to somebody they may know outside their company who could use your skills.

The Informational Interview is a part of the “cold-calling” process whereby you are generating your own job leads. Your ultimate purpose is to get your foot in the door. You should ask for a critique of your resume, or for their ideas of how you might break into a specific job field. If you do your job well, you will walk away with job leads or names of people they recommend you meet with.

- **The Screening Interview:** Typically this is the first step a company takes after the resumes have been scrutinized. The purpose of this meeting is to assess the skills and personality traits of the potential candidates. The objective ultimately is to “screen out” those applicants the interviewer feels should not be hired due to lack of skills or bad first impressions. The interviewer must also “screen in” those candidates she/he feels would make a valuable contribution to the company. Your job during this preliminary meeting is to convince this person you are worthy to take the next step.
- **The General/Structured Interview:** Frequently the Screening Interview is combined with the General Interview due to time constraints many companies have during the hiring process. Often you will meet with the supervisor over the position for which you are applying. During this interview you will be discussing the specifics of the position, the company and industry.
- **The Group Interview:** This can be the most intimidating interview because it involves you and perhaps 2-5 interviewers. Companies will use these Group Interviews to save time in the process as well as to observe how well you do under pressure and in a group setting. Your job here is to answer each question as if you are on a one-to-one interview.

Some employers will use personality or behavioral tests for positions dealing with a lot of internal and external stress from customers or for executive level positions. One really cannot prepare for these tests, other than to be honest and do not answer what you think they want to hear.

## WHAT EMPLOYERS TELL US

What entices employers to interview applicants?

- A well-written resume and cover letter
- Demonstrated initiative and uniqueness in approaching the employer
- Following up with the employer to schedule interview

Employers look for more than technical or specific job-related skills when hiring new employees. Certain characteristics have been found to be essential in developing an effective team. Employers look for these characteristics during the hiring process. Knowing these characteristics and being able to identify them in yourself will enhance your success at interviews and increase your chances of getting the job that you desire.

Certain characteristics that are highly desirable to employers are:

- Excellent listening skills
- Strong written and verbal communication skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Proven ability to get along well with co-workers
- Dedication, reliability and good attendance record

For an interviewer to identify your strengths in these areas, they need to ask behavior-based or situational questions such as “Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker, and how you resolved it.” This type of question is becoming more and more common in interviews.

Make sure to offer examples when asked open-ended questions. Answering with just a “yes” or “no” leaves the employer wondering if you truly stand behind your answer.

**Employers repeatedly said that following-up each interview with a thank you note within 24 hours indicates attention to detail, good business manners and enthusiasm for the job. This could be a tiebreaker if everything else is equal.**

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

The resume was successful, you scheduled the interview, and you researched the company the time has come to close the deal. It's your opportunity to shine. The interviewer has on average 30 minutes to figure out what you are all about and decide how you would fit in at their company. The better you can present yourself in this short time frame, the better your chances are of being hired.

**Fact: After the first minute, the interviewer may have already decided whether or not they would be interested in hiring you.**

Make sure your first impression is strong. Be dressed and groomed properly. Be on time. Practice your handshake and watch your body language. Do not sit as soon as you walk into the office as you could come across as being too relaxed; wait for the interviewer to offer you a seat.

Your Interpersonal Skills are extremely important throughout the interview. What is your body language saying about you? Try not to cross your arms. Do not lean too far back in the chair, as you may appear to be too relaxed. Remember to use eye contact. Smile and act enthusiastic to be there – within reason.

The interviewer is judging your verbal and non-verbal cues. Speak clearly. Think carefully about your answer before you speak. It is more appropriate to have a moment of silence, than to fill that silence with small talk while you think through your answer. Answer the question and stay on subject. Try not to ramble because the interviewer will have to sort through your answer to find the information they need.

Learn good listening skills to avoid any misunderstanding. Ask questions for clarity or if you need more information in order to respond appropriately.

Remember, it is during the discussion that the interviewer is judging how you will fit in at their company. How motivated are you? How do you handle yourself and how are you at quick thinking?

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### 1) What is your greatest strength?

- Select a strength that matches one of the essential qualifications of the position
- For example if the position requires good organizational skills and that is a particular strength of yours, emphasize that fact.
- Be prepared to give an example of a situation or situations where you utilized this skill successfully.
- Don't be afraid to give the interviewer more than one strength but don't give a lengthy list – it hurts your credibility.
- If none of your strengths are applicable to the position you should reconsider whether or not this job is the right match for you.

### 2) What is your greatest weakness?

- Be honest - no one is perfect – there is always room for improvement. An Interviewer does not want to hear “I don't have any weaknesses.”
- If you do not want to classify something as a weakness then state that you are not satisfied with a particular skill area that you consider being “just average”.
- State that in doing a self-assessment/self-evaluation that you identified a particular area as needing improvement. It shows initiative, the ability to be introspective and that you are not willing to become complacent about you or your job/you do not always need your boss to point things out to you.
- Be prepared to answer the question “What would your former boss tell me if I asked him/her for an area that you needed to improve upon? Do not follow-up your response with why you disagreed with this assessment.

### 3) If you and all the other potential employees had the same background in education and experience what would make me hire you over the others?

- The employer wants proof that you are the best match for the position.
- You could state that you are familiar with how an organization such as theirs works; you understand the right procedures and paths to follow to get the work accomplished efficiently and professionally.
- Confidence in your skills will be very important during this question.
- Convince them that you will add value to their company – sell yourself!



## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - CONTINUED

4) If you were hiring somebody for this position, what qualities would you look for?

- This is an excellent opportunity to link your qualifications with the position you are interviewing for.
- For example, you could state that anyone in that position would need strong problem solving skills and be comfortable working with diverse populations, which are skills you have developed in prior positions.

5) Are you more comfortable working as a part of a team or individually?

- Be honest. The goal of interviewing is not just to get the job. You also need to decide if this job is right for you.
- If you enjoy working individually and the position in question works mainly as part of a team, you need to take this into serious consideration.
- It is important that you keep in mind that getting a job is not as important as getting the **right** job.

6) Why are you leaving your current position?

- Be honest but **stay positive**.
- If you are leaving due to a negative situation, prepare an answer that focuses on what your current employer does not offer you that you hope this employer will offer. This can be a more positive work environment or more opportunities for advancement.  
**NEVER** complain or say negative things about your current or past employer.

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW DISCUSSION

- Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question. Never assume you know what they mean.
- Never argue or debate with the interviewer
- Do not ramble, as you could potentially talk yourself out of the job
- Think before you respond, gather your thoughts and then give a quality answer that is to the point
- Stay positive in all your answers
- Keep all your answers related to your job qualifications. When asked “Tell me about yourself” try to keep the answer related to your goals, education or work experience
- Watch your body language. If you are slouching, swinging your legs and playing with your hair, it will give the interviewer the feeling you are not a self-confident person. You always want to sit straight up, pay attention and make sure you are not doing any nervous gestures
- Always ask the interviewer when they will be making their decision. This will allow you to leave the interview knowing when you should expect to hear from them
- Remember...being a little nervous is normal and expected



## COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Tell me about yourself
- 2) Why do you want to work for this company?
- 3) Why do you feel you are the best candidate for this position?
- 4) What made you decide to go into\_\_\_\_\_?
- 5) Tell me about your last job.
- 6) What do you know about our organization?
- 7) Describe your ideal work environment.
- 8) Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years?
- 9) What is your idea of a good manager/supervisor?
- 10) What did you enjoy the most/least about your most recent job?
- 11) Why did you leave a certain position?
- 12) How did you hear about this job opening?
- 13) Give me an example of a time you handled a conflict effectively.
- 14) Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.
- 15) What would a former co-worker say is your greatest weakness?
- 16) What would a former manager say is your greatest strength?
- 17) How does your work experience relate to this position?
- 18) Tell me about any leadership roles you have held.
- 19) If offered the position, when would you be able to start?
- 20) Do you have any questions?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE EMPLOYER IN AN INTERVIEW

Be sure you come prepared with a few questions for the interviewer. If you do not ask questions, you may be viewed as not having done your homework or as not really being interested in the job. Some questions you can ask are:

- 1) Where does this position fit into the structure of your corporation? Who would I report to directly report to?
- 2) On your website I noticed you are offering a new product line – has it been successful? Reason(s) for its success/failure?
- 3) What is a typical day like for someone in this position?
- 4) What types of advancement opportunities are there for someone with my qualifications and background?
- 5) What type of training would I receive?
- 6) Where do you see your company in 5 years, 10 years?
- 7) How would you describe the work environment here?
- 8) What happened to the person that held this position previously?
- 9) Describe the Company's review/evaluation process.
- 10) Does this company offer tuition reimbursement?
- 11) How would you describe your typical customer?
- 12) What skills/qualifications are you looking for in your ideal candidate?

Stay away from asking questions about salary. Only discuss your salary expectations if the interviewer brings it up first. A human resources person should be able to review employee benefits with you (this information may not be offered to you during a first interview).

Think of the interview as your opportunity to learn as much about the employer as you can. You can learn a lot of things simply by observing the environment. Are the employees dressed casually or in suits? Do they seem relaxed or stressed? Does the furniture look comfortable and inviting or more stiff and formal? Is it noisy? Is it clean? Did people appear prepared to see you? Before you go to an interview, you need to decide what type of environment you'd like to work in and try to observe those things that will help determine if the organization could be a fit for you. Remember that you are also interviewing the company – Is this the right job for you?

## INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS MAY ASK

The following questions represent only a sampling of illegal questions. Typically illegal questions during an interview involve age, marital status, national origin, physical disabilities or religion.

- How old are you?
- Are you married, single or engaged?
- Do you have any children?
- Are you disabled in any way?
- Where did you learn to speak Spanish?
- Do you need to take time off of work for any religious holidays?

Again, we cannot tell you what to say if you were ever asked these questions. But, if any one of these questions were presented during an interview, do not argue with the interviewer, instead you may ask the relevance of how that question relates to the position you are interviewing for. You may also want to decide if you want to work for an employer that would ask these questions.



## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

You will know when the interview time has ended upon hearing the interviewer say “Thank you for coming in!” The interview has ended but you still have some **VERY** important steps left. Before you leave, thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Once you get home you need to write a thank you letter.

Writing thank you letters can mean the difference between getting the position you desire and missing out on a great opportunity. The purpose of this letter is to restate your interest in the position while reminding the interviewer of your specific strengths that you wish to remain in their minds while they continue the interview process. Your thoughtfulness will be remembered and may be the final thing that allows an employer to decide on you instead of another candidate.

Tips for your thank you letter:

- Write about something specific that was discussed in the interview which makes you unique and qualified for the position
- Multiple interviewers means multiple letters. Each individual interviewer should receive a thank you letter following the interview.
- Spell everything correctly. One incorrect spelling can ruin your chances. Have a family member or a friend proofread your thank you before you mail it
- Be sure to get the proper spelling of the interviewers’ first and last names and job titles.
- Mail, fax or email the thank you note within 24 hours after your interview, being given a lead, or receiving assistance of any kind
- Always send a Thank You Note to your references and let them know when you secure a position
- After you start your new job, you may discover that your thank you note significantly contributed to your selection by your employer!

**It is also a good idea to critique yourself after the interview. Ask yourself how you could have improved. Did you wish that you had spent more time researching the company? Did you ask the right questions? What type of impression did you make?**

October 1, 2010

Thank You Letter Sample

Mr. Robert V. Maxx  
Vice President Human Resources  
Universal Tire Corporation  
2000 Park Drive  
Rosemount, MN 55068

Dear Mr. Maxx:

As I was leaving your office on September 30, 2010 I was reflecting upon how much I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about Universal Tire Corporation. I appreciate the time you spent with me discussing your opening for an Outside Sales Representative.

I believe my internship with Shemax, Inc. and my educational background in Marketing and Business Administration make me an excellent candidate for the position. You mentioned the importance of having an outgoing person with a lot of initiative. I feel that my experience in using my marketing, communication and customer service skills would exceed your expectations if given the chance.

I was also very impressed with Universal Tire's commitment to investing in your employee's future through the Tuition Reimbursement Program you mentioned. I look forward to hearing from you soon. In the meantime, please contact me at 651-555-3162 or email me at #####@gmail.com if there is any additional information I can provide to help you in your decision.

Sincerely,

Mary Johnson

## **COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY DCTC STUDENTS**

### **1) When should I discuss salary and benefits at an interview?**

It is recommended that you allow the employer to bring it up. Otherwise, wait until you have been offered the position.

### **2) Are thank you notes really important?**

YES, YES, YES. Thank you notes are a major factor in securing any position. They should be sent within 24 hours after an interview and should emphasize what you can contribute to the organization.

### **3) Is it really important to get a job offer in writing?**

It is absolutely essential to have a written agreement. Written agreements protect both you and the employer.

### **4) Do I need to have a voicemail or an answering machine?**

A voicemail or an answering machine with a professional sounding message is essential. Employers may not call back to arrange interviews but they will leave a message.

### **5) How should I inform my current employer that I am leaving?**

In person (if possible) and in writing, write a letter of resignation thanking the employer for the opportunities that you were given to:

- Contribute to the growth and success of the company (be specific)
- Learn and grow
- Develop your skills and experience. Be honest but do not be critical. Do not burn any bridges. Give a 2 week notice whenever possible. Some employers will not want you to remain for the 2-weekperiod. Do not take it personally. Just move on.

### **6) If you get bad vibes during the interview, how do you politely decline?**

Be honest. The employer will appreciate you not wasting their time. Let them know you do not think it is a good fit and you appreciated their time.



## IN SUMMARY – INTERVIEWING ETIQUETTE TIPS

- Write a thank-you letter to the interviewer(s) immediately following the interview. Thank him/her (them) for the interview, recap what you learned from the interview, and reaffirm your interest in the job (ask for the job!) This can even be e-mailed or faxed the same day.
- Double-check the time of appointment. Arrange to be ten to fifteen minutes early, before the scheduled time. If time permits, do a dry run beforehand.
- Have extra copies of your resume and cover letter with you. Make sure these are clean copies on resume paper. Have your reference list available also, including names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- Be sure that your references gave you permission to use them as a reference and expect phone calls or other inquiries about you. It is helpful to send them a copy of your resume and the job description so they can be better prepared to discuss your qualifications for the position.
- Wear clean, well-pressed clothing appropriate to the job you are seeking. Arrive well groomed from head to heels.
- Give the appearance of self-confidence and energy when you first enter the room: Smile. Be yourself. Give a firm handshake. Be relaxed. Maintain eye contact.
- Be positive, but not overly friendly with the interviewer.
- Before answering a question take time to pause and plan an appropriate response. Try not to fill “awkward” silences with nervous responses.
- Keep your responses positive. Prepare positive answers to the most frequently asked interviewing questions.
- Prepare positive responses to cover an irregular or problematic work history. At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer(s) for their consideration and time.

