



Preparing for the Interview and Successful Interviewing Strategies

You have worked hard and it has paid off: You have landed an interview. Celebrate your achievement, but remember you still have work to do. Now you must prepare for the interview. The interview time can be a stressful part of the whole process of looking for work. But you can prepare by thinking about your answers to possible interview questions, what you should wear, and how you should act.

This is your opportunity to highlight your academic, work, and life experiences. No doubt you want the interviewer to know that you are organized and prepared for this opportunity. The following tips will help you be just that.

Tips—days before the interview

1. Prepare Yourself

Prepare for the interview the way you would prepare for an exam. First, make sure you know material well – your qualifications, skills, and interests; the requirements of the position; the organization and its culture; and how what you have to offer fits with the needs of the organization.

2. Practice

Sharpen your interview skills by practicing your responses to questions that you might be asked in an interview. See activity #3 for typical questions. Also, ask friends who have recently gone on an interview to recall some of the questions they were asked and share them with you.

3. Create a Top 5

Identify the top five things you want the person conducting the interview to know about you. Think about how your experience in work, classes, and activities relate to the job you're seeking.

4. Do Your Homework

Learn as much as you can about the organization and position beforehand—know its products and services, its culture, its dress code etc...Good sources of information are Career and Placement Services, library, and the Internet. Information you may want to know can include: number of people in the organization, major products or services, organizational structure, major competitors, local or national news that affects the employer.

5. Do a Mock Interview

Practice interviews with a career counselor, friends, or family members. Ask for constructive feedback on your performance. You can book an appointment with a CaPS Career Advisor for a mock interview. This can be done either in-person or by distance using the telephone or Skype (voice-over Internet) and a desktop sharing program. The Career Advisor will provide you with feedback on how to respond to questions in a way that brings out the skills and qualities you have to offer potential employers.

6. Ask Questions

Ask the person who scheduled the meeting the name(s) of the person(s) who will be conducting the interview and his or her position and area of responsibility. You may want to ask how many other candidates are being interviewed. This will let you know the competitiveness of the interview.

7. Be Prepared

Consider what you will wear to the interview; for most interviews this is business attire. Make sure your clothing is pressed, your shoes are shined, and your hair and nails are well groomed. Find out, beforehand, how to get to the interview site. If possible, visit the site in advance and note how long it takes you to get there. Bring extra copies of your resume and prepare a list of three references. Remember to ask your references for permission to use their names for this purpose.

8. Anticipate Questions

Possible interview questions could include:

- Tell me the reasons why you submitted your name for this position?
- What assets would you bring to this organization?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your employer or professor on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result?
- Describe a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your employer or class was facing. What was the challenge?
- Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others?
- Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish a task with someone who was particularly difficult to get along with. What strategies did you employ to get the job done?
- Tell me about a time when your work load was heavy. How did you complete all your work and meet the deadlines? What about a time when you could not meet your deadline, what did you do?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in building and maintaining successful professional relationship? Give me examples of how you've made these work for you.
- What do you see as the role of this organization in the broader community?
- What's your greatest strength? What's an area that needs improving?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years from now?

Tips—the day of the interview

- Relax: today's the day that you have been waiting for!
- Call someone who is a strong supporter of yours for words of encouragement.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the interview and arrive at least 10 minutes before the interview is scheduled to begin.
- Remember: do not chew gum during an interview!

Tips—during the interview

- Be calm, confident, and assertive. Remember that the interview is also a way for you to learn if the job is right for you.
- Smile when you introduce yourself.
- A handshake can speak volumes about your confidence level; a handshake should be firm but not too strong.
- Use the interviewer's name.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward towards the interviewer when answering the question.
- When answering questions relate your experiences to the position that you are applying for.
- Try not to fidget (e.g. avoid playing your hair or shaking your legs).
- Speak slowly and clearly and do not be afraid to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts. If you are provided with a pen and paper, take a minute to formulate your key points and write them down.
- Be honest. Don't try to cover up mistakes. Instead, focus on how you have learned from them.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions about the position and the organization. For example you can ask: What issues or concerns are facing this organization now? What new projects has this department undertaken recently? Where will this job fit into the organizational structure? Is there any travel? When may I expect to hear from you?
- Ask the interviewer for a business card and send a thank-you note or e-mail as soon as possible.

Activities to Do On Your Own

- After you have been called for an interview and the time is set, if possible take a trip to the location. Calculate the best route in the shortest time. Remember to account for an increase in traffic on the actual day. Once you are at the sight, observe the people coming in and out of the building. Notice the way they are dressed: casual, business attired? Plan your wardrobe for the interview accordingly. If you can't visit the site before hand, get specific directions from someone who's driven there before or through one of the Internet map sites that provide directions (e.g. www.mapquest.ca).
- Make a list of five to ten points related to your skills, accomplishments, etc. that you want to bring across in any interview. Consider strategies for how you will ensure that you make these points in the interview (e.g. how you will incorporate them into your responses to interview questions, a summary statement you make at the end of the interview).
- Consider some typical questions that interviewers often ask. Prepare answers to the following questions and add any additional ones too. Ask a friend or relative to act as the interviewer and practice your responses aloud. Ask for feedback.
- Write a thank you message within twenty-four hours of the interview. Address any issues or concerns that may have come up in the interview. Ask a friend to proof read it for you. Make any suggested changes and send the thank you note.