

Interviews

A HILLSDALE COLLEGE CAREER SERVICES GUIDE

JOB INTERVIEWS

Obtaining an Interview

1. Make your resume stand out.

- You can use a color of paper other than the traditional white. Suggestions: light gray or cream.

2. Use contacts within organizations.

- Talk to friends and/or acquaintances working within companies or agencies which interest you.
- Proactively try to meet someone from the company to obtain information about whom to contact for an interview.
- Use LinkedIn when possible.

3. Don't wait for the job to come to you.

- Actively pursue firms of interest to you. Companies prefer people who desire to work for them; it reduces their need to seek out potential candidates.
- Inquire about job opportunities even if the firm is not hiring. Many firms do not advertise positions when they only need one or two people.

- Reconnect with past job contacts where no career developed. Be sure to mention how your strong interest in them has never diminished.

4. Use all job search strategies.

- Read wanted ads in newspapers and other professional publications. Do not be too proud to explore positions that seem below your qualifications.
- Constantly revise your resume, making it more applicable to certain kinds of employers.
- Call organizations that interest you.

5. Deliver your resume in person.

- Ask for the hiring manager by name.
- Shake their hand and make good eye contact so the manager remembers your determined, proactive approach in delivering your resume.
- If hand-delivering your resume is not an option, send it as a certified letter from the post office to the hiring manager. This ensures the manager receives

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the mail personally. But it is also important to follow the application instructions.

PURPOSE

Evaluating and Being Evaluated

“The purpose of a job interview is twofold: It offers the employer valuable insight into your personality and abilities, and it allows you the chance to discern whether your credentials and career goals match up with what the company seeks.”

— Lisa Finn

“Purpose of Job Interviews,” *work.chron.com*

Updated Fall 2016

Preparing for the Interview

Once you've got an interview lined up, you need to learn what to expect so you can know how to respond. The better prepared you are, the more confident you will feel and the more capable you will appear. Here are a few ways to be ready.

1. Know yourself. It is not easy to articulate your strengths to an interviewer if you have not articulated them to yourself. Be sure you can discuss your skills and abilities, training, experience, education, and career plans and goals. A common reason recruiters reject candidates is their inability to clearly communicate their goals, strengths, and career direction.

2. Prepare answers to anticipated questions. See the following page for sample questions.

3. Select an interview wardrobe. Wear professional attire that is appropriate

for the position you are seeking. First impressions are important!

4. Create an interview portfolio. This could include a resume, writing samples, and any samples of other work related to the position you are pursuing.

5. Know the company. Consult the organization's website for information on the organization, its services, and its mission.

6. Know the details. Write down the time and place of your appointment, and make sure you know the name of the person interviewing you. Get good

directions, and visit the site prior to the interview if possible.

7. Know what to ask. Prepare a list of at least six questions to address during any preliminary interview. See the section below for ideas.

8. Identify your goals for the interview. Know what the ideal outcome would be and what impression you want to leave.

9. Practice. Answer the sample questions. Sign up for a mock interview with the staff in Career Services.

Questions to Ask the Employer

1. I'm familiar with the corporate culture, but what does a regular day look like for this department/business?
2. How many people are on staff in the _____ department/business?
3. Does the _____ department work closely with any other internal departments?
4. Can you describe your company's philosophy of customer service?
5. What is your favorite thing about working here?
6. What are your expectations for employees?
7. What are the prospects for growth and advancement?
8. How much freedom/responsibility does your company give employees?
9. What differentiates your organization from your competitors or similar organizations?
10. Is this a new position? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
11. I've presented myself and my qualifications, what do you think about the strength of my application? Might I need improvements? (**Write down the answer!**)

Close the interview — If you are interested in pursuing the company at the end of the initial interview, confirm your desire to work for the company and ask what the next step/timeline in the interview process would be.

For more suggestions regarding job interview questions/answers:

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewquest.htm>

Skills and Qualities Looked For in a Behavioral Interview

Adaptability	Impact	Proficiency
Analysis	Independence	Rapport building
Attention to detail	Initiative	Research
Budget Management	Innovation	Resilience
Collaboration	Insight	Risk taking
Communication: written and oral	Integrity	Safety awareness
Conflict resolution	Interpersonal	Sales ability/Persuasiveness
Control	Judgment	Self-awareness
Creativity	Leadership / Influence	Sensitivity
Critical thinking	Listening	Strategic analysis
Customer service	Management	Stress management
Decisiveness	Motivation	Supervision / Evaluation Teamwork
Delegation	Negotiation	Technical / Professional knowledge
Development of subordinates	Organization	Tenacity
Energy	Participative	Time management
Entrepreneurship	Planning and organization	Training
Equipment operation	Practical learning	Work ethic / Quality
Fact finding-oral	Presentation skills	
Financial analysis	Problem solving	
Flexibility	Process operation	
Goal-oriented	Professional Development/Growth	

Behavioral Interview Questions

- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to deal effectively with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
- What examples can you give me that reflect your ability to apply good judgment in a challenging situation?
- If you found out that one of your co-workers was doing something dishonest, what would you do?

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Information interviewing is a **method of career research**. If you are unsure about the career path you should pursue, or if you desire to know more about potential job opportunities, an informational interview can potentially help answer these questions.

Information interviewing provides a **route to explore your field of interest**. This interview differs from employment interviewing in that you make the contact, prepare the question, and are seeking information, not employment.

Benefits from an Informational Interview

- Gain current, field-specific career information.
- Begin forming a professional network.
- Expand your job market knowledge.
- Find out about job or career paths that you did not know existed.
- Find out what you should be doing to be competitive in today's market.
- Learn a skill that can assist in employment interviews and on the job.

Before the Informational Interview

1. Have a plan. It is necessary have confidence in describing who you are, and have a good understanding of the particular fields you are interested in. After you have explored some career options, an information interview may be exactly what you need to pinpoint what job you want to target.

2. Make a list. Brainstorm questions you would like answered. Try to use a mixture of open-ended questions and questions that require direct answers.

3. Prepare a letter or e-mail of inquiry. See Cover Letter booklet.

4. Develop a contact list. Include names of friends, relatives, employers, co-workers, Career Services, etc. Use LinkedIn and other social networking sites to find mutual connections. It is always in your favor for a mutual friend to introduce you to a potential interviewee.

5. Present your request. Contact these people in a professional manner using a letter of inquiry and/or a telephone script. Remember, your intention is to gain information, not obtain a job.

6. Arrange a meeting time. Clear your schedule to accommodate your interviewee's time constraints. Arrange a mutually convenient location, but be willing to travel to the location that works best for them. Meetings should last around thirty minutes.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

A behavioral interview focuses on situational questions such as "How would you handle XYZ situation?" This technique is often used in hiring processes because it is a very effective assessment tool. Behavioral interviews allow employers to ascertain candidate performance, identify key skill competencies, and indicate future success in a position. Your objective should be to communicate clearly how your past experiences and knowledge may be of clear benefit to the role and the organization. Specific examples of past performance can come from any intern experiences, work experiences, academic experiences, and leadership involvement in student or community groups.

Preparation

Identify the key qualities and specific examples tied to those qualities. For example, a specific teaching-related situation where you have demonstrated initiative, problem-solving, innovation, adaptability, or teamwork. Use the STAR method for responding to specific questions:

- **Situation/event/problem** — state it.
- **Task** — What was the challenge before you?
- **Action** — What were the specific steps taken to address the challenge and situation?
- **Results** —highlight the positive outcome.

Questions Asked by the Employer

1. "Tell me about yourself."

- The real question on your interviewer's mind is: "How will you add value to this company?"
- Be prepared with an "elevator speech" to clearly and concisely communicate who you are and what motivates you, in a minute or less.
- One way to present a positive image of yourself without sounding prideful is to say: "The compliment I often receive is..."

2. School-Related Questions

- Why did you choose Hillsdale College?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What are your extracurricular activities?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- If I were to ask your professors/mentors to describe you, what would they say?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
- What was your biggest challenge as a student, and how did you handle it?

3. Personal Questions

- How would you describe your work style? (Do you prefer independent or team work?)
- Which of your personal characteristics enhance your effectiveness in communicating with others?

- What do you consider to be some of your greatest accomplishments?
- What is one thing about yourself that you would most like to change?
- How do you organize yourself to accomplish goals?
- What are your career goals for the next three to five years?
- What factors most influence your willingness to take a risk?

4. Specific Job-Related Questions

- What new ideas can you bring to this company?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- Are you willing to travel/relocate?
- Are you willing to work evenings and weekends?
- Is there anything I haven't told you about the job or company that you would like to know?

5. Other Questions

- What has been your experience in working as a part of a team?
- In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of working as a part of a team? Why?
- If you had an opportunity to develop a basic set of values and beliefs which would serve as a company's foundation for success, what would those be?
- How do you evaluate success?

Common Questions and Suggested Answers:

1. What is your greatest strength/weakness?

- **Strength:** It is important to highlight a strength that shows you are qualified for the job. Be specific and give examples when possible. Instead of saying: "I'm good at getting things done in a timely fashion," say: "I have great time-management skills and frequently finish projects ahead of my deadlines. For example, at my internship as a research assistant I constantly requested more projects from my supervisor who rarely had to check on me because I was self-motivated and efficient with my time."
- **Weakness:** The key is to be honest but not self-deprecating. Try highlighting a weakness that does not directly pertain to the job for which you are applying, or talk about an area of weakness in which you have grown (give examples of growth). You can also turn

a negative into a positive by saying something like: "I tend toward perfectionism, and I can tend to spend more time on a project than necessary. The benefit of this trait is that I produce high-quality work, but I have to be careful to allocate my time wisely."

2. How do you handle stress and pressure?

- I actually work better under pressure and I've found that I enjoy working in a challenging environment.
- Prioritizing my responsibilities so I have a clear idea of what needs to be done when, has helped me effectively manage pressure on the job.
- I find it exhilarating to be in a dynamic environment where the pressure is on.
- I'm the kind of person who stays calm under pressure, and handles stress fairly easily.

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3. Why do you want this position?

- Be sure to emphasize both why the job would be a good fit for you and why you would be a good fit for the job. (i.e. “Working as your executive assistant would give me the opportunity to work in a fast-paced environment promoting issues that I am passionate about, as well as be a great place for me to utilize my organizational and administrative skills).

4. Why do you think you’re a good fit for this job?

- In answering this question, specifically connect your past experience and qualifications to elements of the position for which you are applying. Show that you identify with the vision of the company, and would be excited to be a part of the team to advance the corporate mission.

Navigating the Interview

You’ve got an interview, you’ve done your research, you’ve prepared and you feel ready. Now it’s time for the interview itself. Here are some tips for success during the interview.

STEP 1 — Introduction and Rapport

During this part of the interview, the interviewer will attempt to make you feel comfortable so that you can interact freely. Topics may include school events, sports, and cultural activities, world events and general conversation about school.

- Know where, when, and who. Arrive ten minutes before the interview, and be clear on the exact location (building and room number) of your interview. Make sure you know the name of the interviewer.
- Check your appearance to ensure a positive first impression.
- Stand to greet the interviewer. Smile, introduce yourself, and address him or her by name.
- If the interviewer moves to shake hands do so, but it is appropriate to wait for him/her to make the first gesture. Shake hands firmly, standing straight, and maintain good eye contact.
- Think of the interview as a two-way conversation—an opportunity for both parties to gather information about each other and to learn about your common goals,

interests, and experience.

- Be positive in your responses.
- Listen: it is easiest to answer clearly and effectively if you listen well.
- Do not be afraid of silence. Pauses in any interview always seem longer to you than to the interviewer. A pause before answering a question not only gives you a chance to formulate your thoughts, but it also lets the employer know you are thinking. Rapid-fire answers may give the impression of canned, superficial responses. If you are unsure of the questions, clarify the question with the interviewer. When you have answered the questions, stop. Do not ramble.

STEP 2 — Employer Questions

The interviewer will ask questions attempting to evaluate your skills, abilities (leadership, flexibility, problem-solving skills, etc.), personal qualities, and goals.

- Use examples whenever possible: Instead of “I have a lot of initiative,” say, “One of my strengths is initiative. For example, I thought it would be beneficial

for my residence hall to start a student council, so I recruited interested students and went to the administration with a proposal. Now we have an active residence hall council.”

- Remember, the interviewer is seeking a candidate who is competent, responsible, likeable, and genuine. After your qualifications have been established, the interview is an assessment of your personal qualities, attributes, and goals. The following aspects are also important to keep in mind:

» *Eye contact:* Look directly at the interviewer and not down or around the room.

» *Body language:* Use good posture. Be relaxed but alert with natural hand motions. Avoid nervous tapping or fidgeting. Smile some of the time when appropriate.

» *Voice:* An even pace, not too fast or slow; clear and audible; tone should show natural variation, not monotone; voice should reflect enthusiasm.

» *Self-confidence:* You want to convey a genuine belief that you can do the work and are excited about the prospect. Do not display over-confidence or cockiness.

STEP 3 — Candidate Questions

This is your turn to gain information from the interviewer. Each question that you ask will provide you information that will be important if you need to make a decision about accepting an offer.

- You do not need to wait until the end to ask your questions. Midway through the interview, feel free to ask some of your questions

so the interview has a two-way conversational tone.

- Do not ask canned questions: develop questions with nuance and thought behind them. The quality of the questions you ask is as important as the responses to the interviewer’s questions.
- Do not ask questions about salary or benefits. Develop a range of questions that may include the following topics: position responsibility and challenges, questions about the organization (as long as you could not easily find the answers through your preliminary research), training and orientation, and long-term career path options. Use the

sample questions on p. 3 to help guide you.

STEP 3 — The Close

Usually in this phase, the interviewer will ask you if you have any final questions and will then review what will happen next.

- Emphasize your particular interest in the position.
- State why you feel you are a good fit for the position and/or the organization as a whole.
- If the interviewer has not told you the process that will follow, clarify the timeframe for making a decision and determining your status with them.

Following Up after the Interview

Don’t relax too quickly after an interview: the hard part is over, but the follow-up is just as important.

1. Take notes to debrief. Before your interview becomes a fuzzy memory, take the time to jot down notes about your meeting. Write down both positive and negative aspects of the interview and how you handled them.

2. Send a thank-you letter to the interviewer. Thank-you letters should be sent as soon as possible after every interview. It is not only common courtesy, but because most people do not write them, your note will set you apart from most applicants. If you are interested in the position, this is an excellent opportunity to remind your recruiter of your qualifications.

3. Follow up with a phone call. There will always be some anxiety surrounding follow-up phone calls. As Tom Jackson states in *Guerilla Tactics in the Job Market*, a follow-up strategy

will increase your odds of getting the offer by 30% or more.

4. Be prepared for further interviews. Follow-up interviews may be held 4-7 weeks after the first interview. These interviews usually take place at the organization’s office, may last several hours, and may involve testing.

5. Don’t hold your breath. Typically you will not receive an on-the-spot job offer. Recognize that many organizations are also interviewing college graduates at other colleges across the country and it may take weeks before hiring decisions are made.

6. Don’t be discouraged if you don’t get an offer after the first few interviews. Many well-qualified people go through numerous interviews; you are gaining valuable practice and expertise for handling the next one.

7. Accepting an offer. Never accept a position offer until you have obtained a clear explanation of your responsibilities. Write a letter to the person who offered you the position including all important points pertaining to your position. Keep a copy for yourself.

8. Declining an offer. Be as diplomatic as possible. You want to leave the door open for future career possibilities. Express appreciation for the offer and for their confidence in you.

9. Salary discussions. Be prepared. The more you know about salary ranges for your career area and desired occupations, the more effective you will be in salary negotiations. Avoid bringing up salary until they express an interest in hiring you.