

# Interviews



## Student Career Centre

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## **Interview for Success**

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The interview is a critical point in your job search. These 30 or 45 minutes may determine your future. It is time to tell relevant, pertinent stories about yourself.

### **Purpose of an interview**

The interview allows for an exchange of information between the candidate and the employer. The interview allows both parties to determine if:

1. You can do the job in terms of your training, skills and expertise.
2. You are motivated to achieve the goals of the job.
3. You will fit into the companies cultural.

### **Interview Formats**

- **One-on-one:** One job seeker, one interviewer.
- **Panel:** One job seeker, two or more interviewers present.
- **Telephone/Teleconference:** One job seeker, one or more interviewers not physically present.
- **Presentation:** Job seeker requested to prepare (typically in advance) a presentation to an audience during the course of the interview.
- **Reception/Dining:** One or more job seekers, one or more interviewers. The interview is conducted over a meal or beverages.
- **Role Play:** Involves the job seeker participating in a fictional situation, designed to replicate a scenario that might occur in the position sought.
- **Video Conference:** One job seeker, one or more interviewers conducting the interview via camera and monitor.

### **Types of interview questions**

There are mainly 3 types of interview questions:

1. Standard questions
2. Behavioural questions
3. Unusual questions

#### ***Standard Questions***

These questions are broad in scope and ask you for information that pertains to your abilities, knowledge and individual differences.

*Sample standard questions include:*

1. Tell me about yourself

2. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
3. What is your greatest strength? What is your weakness?
4. What 3 strategies would you use to promote our products?
5. What safety precautions would you use in the lab?

### ***Behavioural Questions***

The behavioural based interview proceeds from a structure pattern of questions designed to probe past behaviour in specific situations. The intent of this style of interview is to get an idea or prediction of how an individual will manage work based on his/her past behaviour.

Use the S.T.A.R method to answer behavioural questions by telling a brief story describing when you exercised the skill in question.



**S** – Situation (briefly describe the situation)

**T** – Task (what had to be accomplished)

**A** – Action (what you did)

**R** – Result (what was the result)

Example: *Tell me a time that you were able to manage and meet a deadline?*

- S:** I was once faced with a situation where a shipment of pipe was delayed due to manufacturing problems with the supplier.
- T:** I knew a crew was scheduled for a particular time and date and the arrival of the shipment was critical.
- A:** I negotiated with the supplier to put an extra crew on over the weekend to ensure the shipments timely arrival.
- R:** The pipe arrived on time and the project was completed within the deadline set. The customer was happy and the company was spared by standby expenses.

### ***Sample behavioural questions***

1. Give me an example of a goal that you set in the past and tell me about your success in achieving it.
2. Describe to me a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer.
3. Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work or school. Tell me what happened, who was involved and what you did in terms of problem solving.

4. How do you get your peers to accept your ideas and contributions?
5. Describe a situation where you were involved in a leadership role.

### ***Unusual questions***

Companies often ask these questions to see how you would handle something unexpected. Your response demonstrates aspects of your thought process.

#### *Sample unusual questions*

1. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
2. Why are manhole covers round?
3. How many quarters does it take to reach the top of the Empire States building?
4. How many cars are there in the USA?
5. How could you find the weight of a Boeing 747 without using a scale?

### **Answering interview questions**

When answering interview questions it is important to:

- Be prepared
- Stay on topic
- Be relevant
- Avoid nervous ramblings

Just because an interviewer keeps looking at you doesn't mean you need to keep talking. Order your thoughts in response to the question and in a conversational tone, answer the question. When you've finished your answer, stop talking! If the interviewer wants more clarification, they will ask an additional question or two on the subject.

### **Inappropriate / Illegal Questions**

Under the Employment Standards Act of BC, questions pertaining to age, race, ancestry, religion, colour, sex, marital status, physical/mental disability, place of origin, political beliefs, family status, and sexual orientation are illegal. Below are examples of such questions:

1. Are you planning to have a family?
2. Would you say that you are generally healthy?
3. Have you ever missed work as a result of stress?
4. Are you married or single?
5. "Bryce," is that a European name?
6. How are you planning to vote in the election?

## **Answering inappropriate interview questions**

When thinking about your answer, keep in mind that the first inappropriate question you encounter in an interview may simply be a slip up on the part of an inexperienced interviewer and is not intended to discriminate. The best thing to do when you encounter an inappropriate question is to direct the conversation towards a discussion of your skills and abilities as they relate to the position.

*Sample Question: When were you born?"*

### **Option**

### **Sample Answer**

#### **Refuse to respond**

*I'd rather not answer that question as it has nothing to do with my abilities to perform the job.*

- Refusing to answer a question can be risky as the employer may perceive you as resistant, secretive or a troublemaker.

#### **Inquire how the question relates to the job.**

*I'm not sure why you are asking that question. My age won't affect my ability to do a great job.*

- By phrasing your response in an open manner, the interviewer will then have the opportunity to explain the reason for this question, if there is one.

#### **Answer the question and address the underlying issue.**

*I imagine that your question stems from a concern that I may be young for this kind of work. In many ways, my age will be of benefit to you. My education is very recent so I am up to date on the latest in the industry. I am energetic and eager to do well.*

- This answer will satisfy the interviewer who has a concern about your ability to perform the job but who may not realize that they have asked an inappropriate question.

#### **Simply answer the question.**

*I was born in September 1985.*

- If you choose to answer in this manner, it may be helpful to add more information that you believe the employer is seeking. For example, *"I am a mature 22 year old and I have considerable skills and experience. My education is very recent so I am up to date on the latest in the industry."* This type of answer acknowledges the facts and presents them as an advantage, not a disadvantage.

## **Top 10 questions to ask in an interview**

1. Describe the atmosphere of the office?

2. How will my performance be measured? By whom?
3. What types of people seem to excel here?
4. What is the company's policy on providing seminars, attending workshops and training so employees can develop their skills?
5. What is the potential for this position and are there opportunities for advancement within the company?
6. Where are the major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?
7. What are the companies short and long term goals?
8. How will I be trained or introduced to the job?
9. What are the expectations of the job in the first few months?
10. Can you give me an idea of a typical workday in this position?

### **Interview Checklist**

- **Be prepared.** Things to bring to your interview include:
  - Resume
  - References and reference letters
  - Pen and paper
  - Copy of the job description
  - Research notes on the organization
  - Your list of questions
- **Dress to impress.** Your interview attire should be clean, presentable and wrinkle-free.
- **Be on time.** Arriving 10 minutes before your interview is considered good timing.
- **Make eye contact.** Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake, warm smile and direct eye contact.
- **Demonstrate that you're a team player.** Employers want a team player who can take direction. No one wants to hire an unmanageable employee.
- **Be honest.** You should never stretch the truth on your resume or during the interview.
- **Act professional.** Do not chew gum, slouch or steer the conversation too far off work related themes. Sit up straight and conduct yourself in a professional demeanor at all times.
- **Ask questions.** The interview is a fact finding session for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Ask questions about the job, clients, or projects and engage the interviewer.
- **Say "thank you".** Close the interview with another firm handshake, a "thank you" and a smile.