

# Interviewing Guidelines

## Purpose

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The interview is a conversation to determine mutual needs. You have certain needs just as the company does. You want to describe how your skills fit the job, but you also want to make sure that the job is right for you. The interviewer's decision to hire you is based on your personality, your skills, your career ambitions, your education, your experience and your ability to communicate these things effectively. Your success on your first interview is a critical factor in getting hired.

## General Suggestions

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### Before the Interview

- Practice! Have a friend ask you common interview questions or, if you feel it is necessary, schedule a mock interview with the Career Development Center.
- Be prepared! Review information on the organization and the position well in advance of the interview. Be prepared to talk about your assets and how they relate to the organization and position.
- Have a professional telephone greeting on your voice mail.

### During the Interview

- Be comfortable discussing everything on your resume, some interviewers will use it as their only guide for the interview.
- Be on time! Even better, be 5 or 10 minutes early. If circumstances cause you to run late, call the interviewer and let them know.
- Dress appropriately. A positive first impression gets the interview off to a good start. If you do not know what is appropriate dress, contact the Career Development Center. Many employers now have a business casual work environment, however, most prefer professional dress for interviews.
- Carry your materials in a professional looking portfolio, folder or briefcase and bring extra copies of your resume.
- Address the interviewer by his/her formal title (Mr. Jones, Miss Smith, etc.).
- Utilize nonverbal communication to show your interest. This may include maintaining appropriate eye contact, smiling, nodding your head, and sitting upright in your chair.
- Be positive. Make a positive first impression by greeting the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake. Keep answers to questions positive and upbeat, do not dwell on negatives.
- Use examples from volunteer work, internships, independent research, employment, courses, and campus or community involvement to make your points clearer. Interviewers often hear the same answers from several candidates, but the stories you tell are unique to you.
- Listen attentively to the interviewer. If you do not understand a question, ask to have it restated.
- Let the interviewer control the questions while you control the answers. Controlling the answers means that you will be deciding what to say and what examples to give as a result of your interview preparation.
- If you do not know the answer to the question, don't be afraid to admit it. If you think your answer may have been too short, ask the interviewer if you answered the question or if he or she would like additional details. If you think your answers are too long and the interviewer does not maintain eye contact with you, stop and ask if you are answering the question.

- Be honest. Any information you give is subject to verification.
- Being nervous is normal; denying it will make you more anxious. If you are not nervous, the interviewer may think you are not really interested in the position. The interviewer is interested in getting to know you and as a rule, will try to relieve your anxiety.

### **Follow-Up**

- At the conclusion of the interview, if you are still interested, politely reaffirm your interest in the position.
- As a professional courtesy, a thank you letter should be sent after every interview.
- If you have not heard from the company within two to three weeks, contact the interviewer and inquire about the status of the position.
- Be aware that many employers will require drug use testing prior to employment. This may often be discussed near the end of a second interview with the test to follow a few days later.
- Be persistent and maintain an optimistic outlook.

### **Professional Image**

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- It is important to project a professional image
- Employers may assume that this is the best you will ever look
- Dress for the job you want, not the job you have. You're trying to sell yourself
- Always wear a suit to an interview, even if the people who work at the organization are not wearing suits and the job for which you are interviewing doesn't require it. Remember, the people there already have the job...you don't.
- Always have fresh breath and clean body hygiene. This may seem obvious but take a shower, use deodorant, and brush your teeth
- Wear cologne and aftershave that is subtle, some people may be allergic. Your scent should leave the room when you do.
- Have clean, short nails without ragged edges.

### **Research the Employer**

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Don't expect the employer to educate you about what they do! Identify the organization's products or services, investigate its history and growth, and learn what you can about the positions for which you are applying. If you cannot find any specific information about the position or organization, then learn something about the industry or field.

Use the WWW. Search for the company/organization/school district on the Internet. Use a search engine built into the browser you are using or visit the Career Development Center home page for tools to help you find information about an organization.

Review informational brochures and videotapes from the organization that may be on file in the Career Development Center

### **Prepare Answers to Common Questions**

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Many of the questions interviewers ask are included in this section. No two interviews or interviewers will be alike. Questions generally take three forms, situational which asks an applicant to respond to a given situation; observational where an applicant is asked to reflect upon the actions of a third party or conceptual where an applicant is asked about their personal philosophy or future goals. However, you should be prepared to answer

the following questions in any interview, including the behavioral interview questions that follow in the next section.

- **Tell me something about yourself.** This is the most frequently asked question in interviews. Always be prepared to summarize your background as it relates to the position for which you are interviewing. It is a wonderful opportunity to sell yourself and you should look forward to this question. Tell the interviewer where you plan to start. You may want to go back to high school if you feel it is relevant, or start with college. Briefly comment on items highlighted on your resume.
- **What are your career goals?** This question tests whether you've determined your career goals, and whether your goals match what the organization has to offer. Sound clear and definite about your goals and demonstrate your knowledge of the organization. Employers are concerned about loyalty and staff turnover. Emphasize the fact that you are being very thorough with your job search to assure that you find the right match. If you are interviewing for an internship, you may want to indicate that you are carefully exploring career options and an internship will give both you and the employer a trial period of employment.
- **Why do you want to work for our organization?** This is your opportunity to demonstrate what you know about the organization from your research. Reasons might include the reputation of the organization or department in terms of products or service; the company's rapid growth, or positive information you have received from employees or previous interns of the organization.
- **Why did you choose Florida Gulf Coast University? or Why did you major in \_\_\_\_?** These questions give you the opportunity to demonstrate your career commitment and your planning ability. Describe how the decision was made.
- **Describe your academic performance.** Accent the positive. Do not offer excuses! Discuss the fact that you've done very well in the courses related to your major and career choice. If you have strong academic references, suggest the employer talk with them. If you have not indicated your grade point average on your resume, there is a very good chance you will be questioned about it. If you think your grade point may create a problem in an interview situation, consult a Career Services staff member.
- **What are your strengths?** Your strengths may be your leadership experience, your academic achievement, your career commitment, your relevant experience, or personal traits such as motivation and dependability. Don't be afraid to repeat or emphasize items on your resume or items that may have already been discussed in the interview.
- **What are some areas in which you feel you need improvement?** Comment on areas that you continue to improve upon such as your computer knowledge or your time management. If you obviously don't meet one of the qualifications for the position, address that issue and discuss how you will acquire that knowledge or skill. If you are an intern applicant, discuss the fact that you do not have relevant experience; however, that's why you are seeking an internship.
- **Tell me what you learned from your internship/student teaching experience.** If you have a related experience category on your resume, be prepared to spend the majority of the interview on this topic. Be ready to give more detail on your responsibilities. Discuss what you learned and observed, and how you grew professionally. Give examples of what you accomplished. Relay positive feedback given to you by co-workers and supervisors. Education majors may want to develop a professional portfolio.
- **Please discuss your personality strengths as they relate to this position.** Make a list of 6-8 of your personality traits that you believe are assets. Write down experiences and examples that demonstrate these traits and be prepared to relay them in the interview.
- **What additional comments do you wish to make regarding your application?** This question usually comes at the end of the interview. If there are important experiences or skills and abilities that you have not had the opportunity to discuss, mention them now. Encourage them to contact your references. Tell them how interested you are in the position.

## Behavior Based Interviews

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Some employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success. In behavior-based interviews, you will constantly be asked to give examples or stories, to provide evidence that you have the skills required for the position. In fact, the interviewer will not continue until you have provided a specific example. Success in behavior based interviews requires preparation and practice. You must be able to recall many experiences quickly, select the most appropriate one, and then describe it effectively. Create a list of 15-20 experiences that demonstrate a variety of your skills and abilities. Draw upon your college experiences, academic and extracurricular; volunteer and works experiences, and when appropriate, personal experiences. Practice telling about these experiences.

When answering behavior based questions be certain to answer the question completely. One way to do this is to follow the STAR acronym in planning and presenting your answers.

### **Situation or Task**

Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.

### **Action**

Action you took Keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.

### **Results**

Results you achieved. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish?

## Prepare Questions to Ask the Employer

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At some point in the interview, usually at the end, the interviewer will ask if you have any questions. You should plan your questions in advance of the interview and perhaps write them down on index cards or a note pad to take with you. Prepare more questions than you will be able to ask, assuming that some of them will be answered during the interview. See the "Questions to Ask Employers" Section for a list of sample questions.

It is possible that the interviewer will answer all of your questions through the course of the interview. If that happens, inform the interviewer that you had questions coming into the interview; however, he or she has done a wonderful job of providing information and at this time your questions have been answered.

At the conclusion of the interview, thank the interviewer and, if you still wish to be considered, sincerely reaffirm your interest in the position.

## Questions Frequently Asked

### Education and Academic Achievements

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- What factors determined your choice of major?
- Why did you choose Florida Gulf Coast University?
- In what campus activities did you participate? Were you in a leadership role? How did you lead?
- Which courses have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
- What is your GPA? Is it reflective of your best efforts?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your education differently?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience? Your greatest challenge?
- Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college expenses?
- Give me an example of a project (or Senior Project) you have completed and take me through the steps you used to complete it.
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects? How do you track the progress of various projects in relation to their deadline? How do you stay focused?
- Tell me about a time when your professor (supervisor) was not available to clarify an assignment; how did you proceed? What mistakes did you make? What was the outcome?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you took an unpopular stand regarding an issue at school or work. What was the situation? What was the outcome?

### Personal

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- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Describe one of your accomplishments.
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- Describe how you set an example for other peers/employees.
- Give me an example of something complex that you needed to effectively communicate to others. What made it complex? Why was it difficult to communicate?
- Tell me about a risk you took to achieve a goal.
- How would you rate your writing skills? What steps have you taken to improve your writing skills? Describe the most difficult report you had to write.
- Tell me about something you have done that is very creative.

### The Job

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- Why do you want to work for our company?
- What is your idea of how our industry works?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What type of work environment do you prefer?

- What interests you most about this job? Least?
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what successful characteristics would you look for in a candidate? What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- What are some of the key problems you think a new person in this position would face?
- Why should we hire you?
- What contributions would you make to our organization?
- What do you know about our company? Our product? Our Service?

## Experience

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- Describe your job-related skills and experience and how it would relate to this position.
- What have you learned most from some of the jobs you have held?
- What did you enjoy most about your last job? Least?
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
- Tell me about an event that really challenged you. How did you meet the challenge? In what way was your approach different from others? What solution did you provide to the employer?
- Explain your role as a group/team member and an example of how you persuaded other people to take action. Were you successful? How have you dealt with conflict with a group situation?
- Describe a time where you made a compromise for the overall good of the team. Why was compromising the right thing to do?
- Give me an example of your ability to manage or supervise others.
- Describe a situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you faced the problems or stress that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you wish you had done more planning. What happened? How could it have been avoided? What did you learn from this experience?

## Career Goals

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- What are your long-range career goals? How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next five years?
- What characteristics do you possess that will make you successful in your career?
- Who or what in your life influenced you the most with regard to your career objectives?

## Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

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- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.

- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Give me an example of a time when you went beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.

## **Questions to Ask Employers**

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- Why is the position available?
- What are your company's goals for the next two to three years? What are the long term goals?
- What outside influences affect your company's growth?
- What are some common characteristics of successful employees within your company?
- What are some characteristics of your company that make it attractive?
- What is the greatest challenge facing your staff (department) now?
- What is a typical day like?
- What types of assignments may I expect the first six months on the job?
- What type of training is available?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- What has been your career path within this company?
- Is relocation likely or required?
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- How will the person who accepts this position be evaluated? By whom?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- Do you have a detailed description of the position for which I am being considered?
- What major challenges and opportunities are facing this organization?
- What do you believe are the major challenges of this job?
- How are employees evaluated?
- What forms of communication exist within the organization?
- How would you describe the organizational structure?
- What would be the scope of my job responsibilities?
- Could you give me some additional information about your training programs?
- What skills do you think are important for your employees?
- If I do my job well, where should I be after years with this organization?
- What civic and cultural activities are available in your community?
- When do you expect to make a hiring decision?
- For Education - classload?, extra class assignments?, available technology?, curriculum?
- Do not ask about salary in an initial interview. Wait for an employment offer to ask about salary and benefits.