

Job Interview

8. Job Interview

General Information

Some Guidelines

As strange as it may sound, but: 50% of the interview is preparation, 50% of the interview is attitude.

In general

- Interviewing is between two parties, and it is about sharing information. It is like a business meeting.
- If the person you are talking to is not the decision maker, then the purpose of this interview and your goal is to get the next interview with the decision maker.

Do's

- Point out the value you can (immediately) add to the prospective employer. Take on a consultant mentality by answering the question what you can do to solve the prospective employer's problem(s).
- Tell them exactly why they should hire you, and only you.
- Dispel their fears that you may need too long to perform, that you will be late or absent, that you might cause problems, that you won't stay for long, or any other fear you might sense.
- When you answer, take your time. There is no need to rush. Before answering, take a deep breath and then give the answer.
- Be consistent in what you say!
- Always take the least trapping answer, i.e. take those situations that show the skills you have to deal with challenges that may possibly emerge each day. Be concrete. Do not get philosophical about various possible meanings of words. Decide for one definition and build your answer on that definition.

- Really know yourself, answer all questions directly rather than rambling on without getting specific, use appropriate vocabulary, give as much importance to people and concepts as you give to facts and things. Listen! If appropriate, use the word WE rather than I.

No No's:

- Never lie about your employment records, your personal history or any circumstances.
- Do not allow the interviewer(s) to get off track. In case they do get off track, give a short answer and lead the conversation back on track.
- Do not disclose every detail of your life. Instead, make a careful selection and give enough information to satisfy the other party.

Preparation

- Research the prospective employer. All universities have a web page. Most of the companies have a web page too. If not, contact their PR department and ask for any information you can possibly get. Talk to people who know the company. Talk to people who do a similar job.
- Write down your list of accomplishments and identify those that are most related and relevant to the specific job.
- Put yourself into the shoes of the prospective employer:
 - What would you like to know about the person you are interviewing?
 - What skills are absolutely necessary to meet the requirements of the job?
 - What additional skills/knowledge/expertise would you expect that person to demonstrate?
- If you don't have all the experience and skills required for the job, how can you make up for those that are missing?
- If there are weak points in your résumé/CV, think of ways to explain them and to make up for them.
- Check on salary.com or links on job hunters' web pages for the potential salary. However, remember that those numbers are obtained from a selected population, and that they are averages. It is a no-no to

discuss salary in the first interview. If in any case possible, you should defer talking about salary until you have an offer.

- Think about what information you want to get from the interview. Write down any question you might have and take them with you.
- Dress at least one level above the position advertised.
- Shortly before the interview: Confirm day and time of the interview by calling or emailing.
- Plan your travel to the site. Leave enough time for unplanned events, such as train delays, etc. Be there at least 15 minutes early.
- Practice the interview with a friend / career professional.
- Get enough sleep the night before.
- Take with you the following:
 - Name and title of the person(s) you are meeting
 - Address and location as well as how to get there
 - Notes you made while researching the company and the position
 - Your cover letter and résumé/CV
 - Any writing or work samples
 - List of points you want to make
 - List of questions you want to pose
 - Your employment and education history
 - List of accomplishments specific to the job
 - Your business card
- Ask the references you want to provide for their permission and their preferred way to be contacted.

Types of Questions

Open ended Questions

These questions use words such as who, where, what, when, how.

Example: Which languages do you speak to what degree? This kind of question elicits what the respondent thinks and enables him to answer precisely without having to put any extra effort in the answer. The respondent can take any direction they want to. These are the real explorative questions.

Closed ended Questions

These questions contain what the person posing the question thinks. They only allow the respondent to agree, to disagree or not to know. These are the possible answers to this kind of question: yes, no, maybe, I don't know. It leaves no room to negotiate an answer. Example: Do you speak Spanish? This kind of questions is usually asked to ascertain facts. They can also accelerate the tempo of the conversation, therefore, you can take extra effort and turn those kinds of questions into open ended questions and take your time to answer.

Questions Probing Alternatives

Here, the respondent may choose between two or more alternatives offered by the person posing the question. Example: Do you speak Spanish or Chinese?

Rhetorical/Leading Questions

This is the trickiest kind of question. It answers itself and is only asking for the respondent's confirmation. Example: I think that you also agree that we need to cut down costs, right? Do not get trapped in those kinds of questions. Translate for yourself this kind of question into an open ended question and give your entire opinion to the matter in an engaged, but emotionally distant manner.

Counter Questions

This is a question that is posed instead of giving an answer to the original question. Example: What do you think about the new regulations?

Counter question: Why do you ask? This is not what you want to do in an interview. Just answer the question that is posed. You may then take it from there and pose your questions, if you have any.

Small Talk Questions

This kind of questions is usually asked in the beginning of an interview and serves as an icebreaker. Don't be shy; there is always something to talk about. During the interview, avoid controversial topics and comments.

Examples of this kind of questions are:

- I saw on your résumé/CV that you like doing XYZ, how did you get interested in this?
- What made you decide to move to XYZ?

Knowledge and Experience Questions

Examples of this kind of questions are:

- What have you learned from the jobs you have had?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What important trends do you see in this industry?

Stress Questions

This kind of question aims at finding out whether you can take stress. Most of the time, these questions do not only call for an answer, but also, if not for the most part, want to provoke. The interviewer wants to directly experience how you handle stress. Examples of this kind of questions are:

- Why are you still looking for a job and have not found one yet?
- How long will it take you to make a really meaningful contribution to our organization?
- Your résumé suggests that you are under-qualified for this position. Why should I hire you?
- Would you be willing to start at a lower salary level because of your inexperience?
- Do you not think that in your age you should be at a different stage in your career?

General guidelines include being prepared for this kind of questions, not to get defensive and slow the process down by taking a deep breath. Then, answer the question by stating facts. Be confident and competent.

Illegal Questions

There are the following biases: Race, color, age, sex, religion, and disability. Examples are:

- Have you ever been arrested?
- Have you ever filed a workers' compensation claim?
- Have you ever been a target of sexual harassment?
- Have you ever been found guilty of sexual harassment?

Listening Skills

Stay calm

There is no need to feel rushed to answer any question. It is perfectly OK if you take a deep breath and gather your thoughts before you answer. This also shows that you process what is being said, and that you are considerate with your answer. Thereby, you also acknowledge the importance of the matter.

Put yourself into the other person's shoes

What are they looking for? What are their needs? How can I uniquely help to solve their problem(s)? To understand this, you have to have the right, unbiased attitude (consultant mentality) and listen closely to what the other person has to say without already formulating your answer while the interviewer is still talking. Always let the other person finish first before you start thinking about what you want to say to it.

Rid yourself of any assumptions

Consider everybody in the interview a source of information. The fewer assumptions you have, the more objectively you can take in the information. You evaluate and consider the information after the interview.

Listen actively

Establish non-verbal contact to the interviewer(s) by offering eye contact, smile, nodding your head. What are they looking for? What are their needs? Again, always let the other person finish first before you start

thinking about what you want to say to it. You are always free to ask furthering questions during the interview. To make sure you understand important points, you may summarize in your own words what has been said "In other words," or "If I understand correctly,".

Challenging Questions in a Non-Academic Interview

Question	Background of the question / how to deal with it / how to answer
Tell me about yourself.	Be brief, but very precise. Tailor your pitch to this company and this job. Answer the question: What is specifically relevant to this job?
What are you most proud of? What are some of your accomplishments?	Talk about 2 to 4 accomplishments that display skills that are necessary for the job, or accomplishments that are comparable to the job.
Why are you looking for a new job?	Be specific as to why you want to change your employer in general: you may want to change the industry, gain more encompassing experience in your field, gain experience with a different kind of organization (i.e. international, non-profit, etc.).
Why do you apply for this job?	What exactly is it about the company / job that makes you applying for this job?
Why should we employ you?	You need to research the employer, and, if possible, have talked to somebody doing a similar job. Also, you have to know the skills that match the job requirements and demonstrate that you are able to meet the position's requirements
What are your strengths?	Again, talk about those accomplishments that show those strengths that are most useful to the prospective employer and in the prospective job.
What are your weaknesses?	Here, follow the rule: If you cannot fix it, feature it. Be open about any shortcomings, talk about them up front. If you can, do not talk about work related weaknesses. Whatever weakness you share, also show that you know how to deal with the weakness and how to make up for it.

What do you expect from this job?	Be clear! Talk about how you see yourself doing the work, what you see yourself enjoying by doing the work, and also how you see yourself developing within the job.
What is your management style?	The way you manage people is depending on whom you manage and is also depending on the work. However: give examples.
Have you ever made unpopular decisions? Describe it and tell us how you handled it.	The rationale behind this question is that people want to understand if you are able to see situations and their implications from different angles and to make decisions as needed. What is also probed for is your ability to handle difficult situations and to communicate them.
What kinds of decisions are difficult for you, and why? How do you handle this?	The rationale behind this question is: Do you know yourself? Do you know how to deal with your 'shortcomings'?
Tell me about a situation in which you failed to reach a goal. What were the reasons for the failure and how did you respond to it?	Be objective and stick to the facts. Do not blame anything on a colleague, nor on yourself. Choose a situation in which facts speak for themselves. What is probed here again is your ability to deal with difficulties, the skill to distance yourself from a situation and to learn from it for the future.
How many other places are you interviewing now?	Of course several, if not a lot. But never name companies, refer to confidentiality.
Hypothetical situations: How would you handle XYZ situation?	Take a few seconds to think about this. Really put yourself into this hypothetical situation. It is legitimate to think about this first. There is no need to rush. Take a deep breath first and then answer calmly and precisely.
Tell me about the worst boss you ever had.	You never talk about your last bosses, companies or colleagues in bad terms. You talk about challenging situations and how you dealt with them. Wherever possible, stick to the facts and circumstances rather than emotions and attitudes.
Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now?	In X years I would like to be able to demonstrate that you have made the right decision in hiring me.

	I want to have grown and developed in my area, and this job is a great stepping stone. I would like to gain more influence and responsibility, and have contributed to the company's efforts.
Describe a few situations where your work was criticized.	This question probes for your ability to communicate situations that are both private and professional. If possible, describe a situation in which your work was criticized, but where the mistake was borne out of the situation itself.
How does this position compare with others you are considering?	Again, do not disclose any of the companies you are currently considering. Respond by pointing out what is specific in this job and what makes it unique for you.
Salary negotiation	Postpone talking about the salary as long as possible. You need to know the employer and the work you are supposed to do first. Wait until you have the offer. Keep in mind: Compensation comes in many currencies, such as benefits, number of paid vacation days, company car, etc. When you finally do talk about salary, there are several ways to respond: If you are prepared to make the first move: Currently I am talking to companies who consider me in the \$ XXXX range. If you want them to make the first move, you can give one of the following answers: I am looking for a challenging position, which is the most important part for me. However, I know you will be fair. (.) How much, compared to your other employees, do you pay for someone with my educational background and

	professional experience? REMEMBER: Companies expect you to know how much you want / need to make. Therefore, do not hesitate to make your request.
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Challenging Questions in an Academic Interview

Questions usually cover three main areas: your research, your teaching and your overall match with the university/department. Below are some example questions that you will most likely encounter during an academic job interview. Be prepared to talk about those in greater detail.

Questions about Research

- Describe your research/dissertation.
- Describe briefly what theoretical framework you used in developing your research.
- Describe briefly what methodology you used conducting your research.
- How does your work compare to the major scholars in your field? What contribution does your dissertation make to the field?
- Are you planning on publishing your dissertation? If yes, which part(s)? How will you go about that?
- What is your next research project?
- What are your long term research plans?

Questions about Teaching

- What is your teaching philosophy?
- Describe your general teaching style.
- We would like you to teach class XYZ. How would you go about that? What would the major goal(s) of this class be?
- What challenges do you face in a classroom? How do you handle them?
- How has your research influenced your teaching?

Questions about Institution/Department

- Why do you want to teach at this institution?
- Our student population is particularly XYZ? How would you handle this?
- How do you see yourself contributing to / fitting into our department?
- Would you be willing to sponsor extra curricular activities? If yes, which ones?
- If you have more than one job offer, how will you decide?

Debriefing Your Interview

Use the following questions to debrief and summarize your interview:

- Organization.
- Interviewed with (names and titles).
- Date and duration of the interview.
- Position interviewed for.
- When should the position be filled?
- How will they follow up with you?
- Overall impression of the organization.
- Overall impression of the position.
- Overall impression of the interviewer(s).
- Things you would do differently.
- Things you would want the interviewer(s) to do differently.
- Are you still interested in the job? No matter what the answer is: Why?
- Do you think they are interested in you? No matter what the answer is: Why?
- Thank you letter sent to / on.
- Any comments.

References

DeLuca MJ (1997). Best Answers To The 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions. McGraw-Hill.
Job Choices: Diversity Edition 2005, National Association of Colleges and Employers.