

“INTERVIEW FOR THE JOB YOU WANT; NOT THE JOB YOU ARE IN”



Participant Handbook

Career Support Services

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ESSENTIAL INTERVIEWING TIPS & TECHNIQUES

PREPARATION BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

DO YOUR HOMEWORK AND COME PREPARED



THE JOB

Carefully review the job duties and qualifications for the position. Write bullet points identifying how you meet or exceed each qualification. Review each job duty listed and make notes for yourself in response to the following questions. Make sure your responses are relative to the position.

- When, where and how often have I performed this specific duty or similar type work? If the work is similar, what makes it similar? If necessary, use your transferrable skills.
- What was my most difficult, complex or challenging experience related to this duty?
- What are the tasks I performed related to this job duty? Identify these steps from start to finish.
- What tools did I use to perform the duties?
- What are my accomplishments or achievements?
- What are the competencies I have to make me successful in this position?

Once you document this information, you should be well prepared to answer the following types of questions. The key to responding to these types of questions is to remember to briefly cover each qualification, match it back to the job duties and think about the competencies you used. You do not need to go into too much detail, summary highlights are sufficient.

- How do you meet the job qualifications?
- Why are you the best qualified for this position?
- What unique talents do you bring to this position?



THE ORGANIZATION

Learn as much as you can about the organization. Below are some ways to gather this information:

- Explore the organization's web-site
- Conduct a Google search
- Talk with others who are familiar with the organization
- Read strategic plans to gain an understanding of the goals and culture
- Learn about their business, products, services and their customers
- Read articles about the organization or the industry to discover any key issues or challenges

If you have done your homework, it shows your interest in the job and/or organization and you should be able to have responses to questions such as:

- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Why should we hire you?



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PRACTICE FOR THE INTERVIEW

After doing your homework on the organization and reading the job announcement thoroughly, create your own mock interview questions. Make the questions related to the job duties, qualifications, competencies and organization's goals identified in the job announcement. This will help you to enhance your knowledge about the position and better prepare you to formulate your responses.

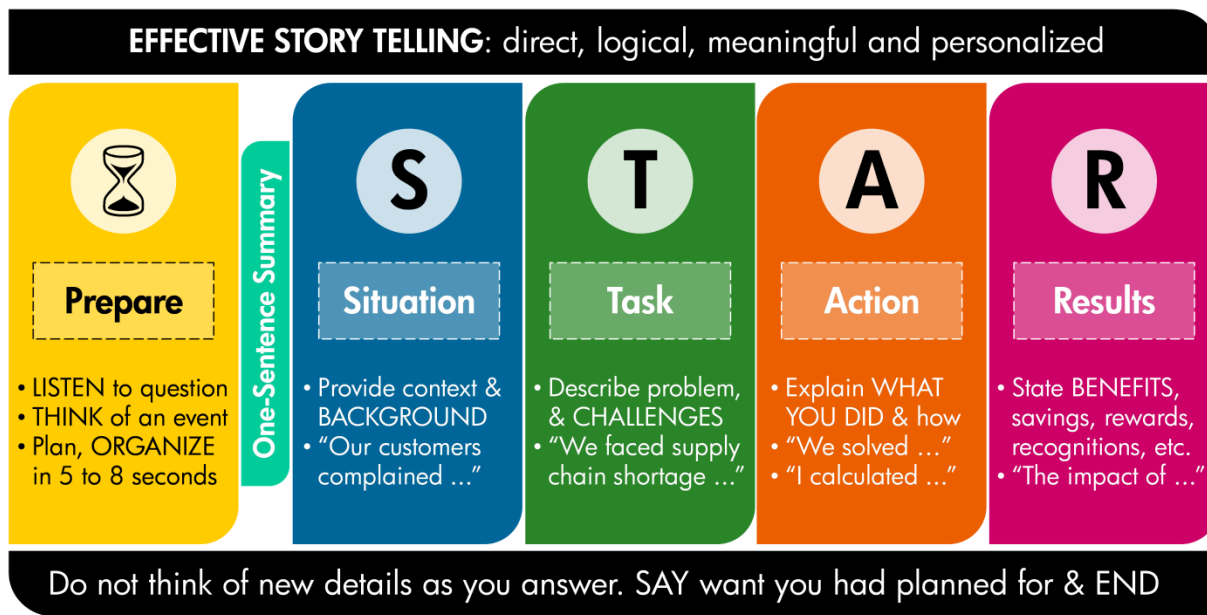
Identify family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers or others who are able to help you practice mock interview questions. The mock interviewers must be able, and willing, to provide you with honest feedback in a supportive manner. Solicit, listen and use constructive feedback from your mock interview practice

If possible, it would be helpful to videotape your mock interview. Videotaped mock interviews are the most common method to prepare for interviews. Place close attention to your verbal or non-verbal communication skills or style. Identify the changes you need to make and incorporate those changes prior to the interview. If you are unable to videotape your mock interview, you may practice in front of a mirror.

One method used to prepare for your interview is the called the "STAR" method, which identifies the situation/problem, task, action and result. This is an excellent process to keep you focused and guide you through your accomplishment stories. Although there are other methods, they all use a very similar process.

ACCOMPLISHMENT STORIES (IT'S ALL ABOUT "YOU")

In an interview, it is vital to be confident in conveying your experience and accomplishments through compelling story telling. Now that you have done your research about the job and the organization, develop 8-10 accomplishment stories that illustrate skills, strengths, abilities and competencies you possess that are relevant to the position. Good accomplishment stories follow the "**STAR**" method and structured as follows:



<http://www.RightAttitudes.com>

When responding to situational or behavioral questions such as, "Tell me about a time when...", "Provide an example of..." or "Describe a situation where..." Choose examples that are relevant to the job for which you are interviewing. Be prepared to discuss what you might do differently next time or what you learned.



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IDENTIFY AND DOCUMENT YOUR REFERENCES

Identify at least three people who are willing to serve as a professional reference and have the ability to respond to work related questions. Although some organizations do not require references in writing, the person should be willing to confirm the information in writing. Bring a neatly typed list of at least three references to the interview. The list should include the name of the reference, job title, relationship at work, contact information including phone number, street and email address.

Be sure that you gain approval from each to use them as a reference. If possible, give each reference contact a copy of the job bulletin in advance of the interview to provide some context about the job. Call your references in advance to alert them to the possible time frame in which they may be contacted to ensure they will be available for the call or email.

If requested, you can provide the information to the interview panel at the conclusion of the interview. Most internal agencies will use your supervisor/manager's contact information identified on the job application

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

Think seriously about the image that you want to portray. Choose the outfit that is appropriate to the position. Below are some additional helpful tips:



- There is an increasing number of people sensitive to fragrance, refrain from using products with fragrances
- Do not wear too much jewelry or bulky jewelry
- Do not consume mints or chew gum during the interview

BRING YOUR MATERIALS TO THE INTERVIEW

As an aid to help you focus and bolster your confidence, bring your cover letter, resume, application form, and responses to any supplemental questions (if applicable) to the interview site and review them before the interview starts. In addition, bring with you to the interview:

- Copy of the job description
- Any notes you may have made to prepare for the interview. Only use your notes as a reference; do not read from them.
- List of at least three professional references with their job titles, phone numbers, name of organization, relationship, street and email addresses
- Notepad and pen (be sure to ask if it is okay to use prior to the interview)



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KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING AND GET THERE EARLY

Use GPS, or a map, if you need it. Do a dry run prior to the day of the interview, if necessary. Allow additional time for last minute glitches, traffic back-ups or bus delays. Plan to arrive at the actual interview location at least twenty minutes prior to the appointed interview time.

BE COURTEOUS AND POLITE TO EVERYONE

Remember to be polite and courteous to everyone you meet along the way to your interview destination. You might actually find yourself riding the same bus or taking the same elevator as someone on the interview panel or the hiring manager.

DURING THE INTERVIEW



BE YOURSELF

It is natural to be nervous before an interview. To help calm yourself take several deep, slow breaths and keep in mind how much you have to offer as an employee. Affirm those good qualities to yourself and maintain your confidence. Show enthusiasm for this position. Stay positive and continue to have a good attitude. Show interest and enthusiasm during the interview.

IF YOU KNOW THE INTERVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

If you know anyone on the interview panel, it is essential that you treat everyone the same. Act as if all of the interviewers know nothing about your background. When responding to interview questions, provide the same level of detail as if you were interviewing with someone who is unfamiliar with you. Remember that your responses are scored by the information you provide during the interview, not how well they know you. Your interactions may also be noted on the interview notes.

IF YOU ARE PROVIDED A COPY OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You may be given a copy of the interview questions to preview prior to the interview; the panel may distribute the list of interview questions as they begin the interview process; or you may not receive the questions at all.

If you receive a copy of the questions, preview the questions and begin to think about your responses. Make a few notes to share in the interview. If they give you a copy to follow along during the interview, make sure you cover each of the elements addressed in the question. Remember to use the STAR method and make note of when, where, how often, tools used, customers served, and specific tasks performed from start to finish.



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and your achievements. After your answer the question, re-read the question to make sure you addressed each of the elements listed.

LISTEN TO THE QUESTION

The most important part of the answer is the question. If you do not hear the question properly, chances are you will not answer it appropriately or completely. Listen without anticipating the end of the question. Do not start trying to answer the questions before asked. If you do not understand the question, you can ask them to rephrase it; or you can re-state the question in your own words and ask the interviewer if that is the question being asked.

USING THE ROYAL “WE”

When responding to questions, it is okay to say “we” did “x, y and z” because it demonstrates your ability to work in a team. Keep in mind that this interview is about you, and it is essential that you describe exactly what you did as part of the team in relationship to “x, y and z.” If you always talk about the royal “we” and do not explain what you did, it may not be clear that you are qualified to perform the job duties and you may not be successful in moving forward in the remainder of the selection process.

PAUSE BEFORE ANSWERING

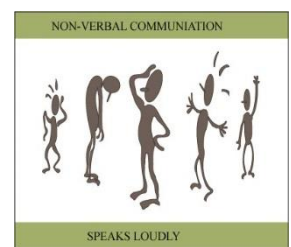
Give yourself a few seconds to collect your thoughts before you start talking. One strategy is to silently ask yourself a short list of questions (such as where/when did I do this, what was my role; what equipment/tools/software did I use; what was the result; is this at a level relevant to this position). Using this technique provides you with an orderly way to keep you focused in delivering your response.

MAKE EYE CONTACT

Maintain good eye contact with all members of the panel as you respond to the questions. First, address the panel member who posed the question, then make eye contact with the other panel members as you continue answering the questions.

BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

Be aware of how you present yourself as you answer questions. You do not want to distract the interviewers from listening to your responses by fidgeting, rocking in your chair, flinging your hands, etc. This is not to say you should be rigid and unexpressive. For example, if you tend to use your hands when you talk, keep them within an imaginary rectangle around your body rather than flinging them about or hold a pen in your hands.



LISTEN FOR THE CUES

Keep in mind that interviewers can be just as uncomfortable in an interview as you are. Their actions in the interview may reflect their uneasiness being a panel member and not a reflection of how you are performing. Some interviewers may seem aloof or overly friendly. This may be the interviewer’s way of reinforcing objectivity. Some interviewers may nod enthusiastically as you talk. This may be a reflection of their desire to



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make you feel comfortable. Your best strategy is to ignore these types of cues and remain focused on responding to the question.

If you finished answering a question and a panel member asks a question such as “Let me explore that a little further” or “Let me put that in another way,” the interviewer may be telling you that 1) you provided only part of the answer or 2) they may be experiencing something similar and are interested in learning how you dealt with the situation. This cue is giving you an opportunity to provide more information. Seize this opportunity and add to your response. Make sure your response does not repeat the previous information you provided.

USING THE WORDS “BUT” OR “HOWEVER” IN YOUR RESPONSES

The words “but” and “however” negate everything that you said. When you start with a positive statement, use the word “and” to connect the phrases. Be strategic when using your words.

TELL THE GOOD TRUTH

Tell the truth. Do not misrepresent yourself. A job interview is not the witness box in a courtroom; it is an opportunity to promote your experience, knowledge, skills, abilities and the competencies that meet the qualifications of the job. Emphasize the positive; omit the negatives, unless you can turn it into a positive learning experience.

DO NOT VENT FRUSTRATIONS OR BAD MOUTH OTHERS

The job interview is not a place to air your on-the-job grievances, legal actions or frustrations. Venting and badmouthing others is inappropriate. Accentuate the positive.

IF YOU FIND YOURSELF RAMBLING

If you are in the middle of providing a response to a question and realize you forgot the question, quickly and gracefully find a way to stop. You may want to say to the interview panel something like, “I just want to make sure I’m addressing all the elements of your question” then clearly and succinctly provide the essential information. Feel free to either review the question in front of you or ask them to repeat the question. Be sure to respond to all parts of the question you did not previously address.

COVER AS MANY POINTS AS YOU CAN IN YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH QUESTION

When answering a question, present your response in outline form rather than trying to formulate an in-depth, detail-packed explanation. Most interviewers are expecting you to cover several points in response to a question. Your score may be lower if you get bogged down in details and do not cover all of the points. Depending on the total time allotted for the interview and the number of interview questions, try to take no more than five minutes to respond to each question. As times, the interview panel will identify the timelines for the interview or each question. If this occurs, be sure to stay within that timeline.

When asked two part questions, answer the question in the order asked. Answer the first part; then ask to have the other parts repeated; or, if you are given a copy of the interview questions, refer to the list of questions provided to you. Feel free to ask the interviewer to repeat the question.



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IDENTIFY PARALLELS AND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND PROVIDE A CONFIDENCE STATEMENT

If you are asked about something, you have not done or an area of knowledge, which is unfamiliar, do not say you have “no experience.” Before you respond, look for parallels and transferable skills between what the interviewers are asking and your past background and experience.

If there is something in the job announcement that you do not have the knowledge or experience, make sure you start learning it or working with it prior to the interview. You will be able to say you are in the process of learning, and identify what you are learning. When describing parallel experiences, explain how your experience is parallel. It may be perfectly clear to you, but not to them.

Although you may not get the highest rating for your answer, you may score higher than the certain zero you would receive by saying “I have no experience.”

If you have no parallel experience to draw upon, talk about what you understand about the duty, function or situation and describe how you would approach it. For example: “Although, I have not conducted investigations, I know it is important to document only the facts and to separate the facts from assumptions and judgments. When conducting investigations and talking with the people involved, I would view their responses as part of a jigsaw puzzle. I would look for pieces that fit, where pieces didn’t fit, and where there were gaps or holes, and proceed to...” Although you may not earn the highest rating, you may score some points for your understanding of the duty, function or situation.

HOW TO HANDLE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Know your strengths and weaknesses. Most of us know our strengths and are comfortable expressing them. Ideally, the strengths you express should relate to the responsibilities of the job. Describing a weakness is harder. There is a concern that one might damage oneself in the process. Some people try to turn a weakness into strength (example: “I work too hard”).



Interviewers will see right through this response. We all have weaknesses. If you cannot express a weakness now, interviewers may wonder if you are capable of doing an honest self-assessment, or if you will be receptive to constructive feedback in the future.

Pick a skill or area of knowledge that can be addressed by training, coaching or experience, and talk about the steps you are taking to address the weakness. For example: “In past positions I’ve been asked to take meeting notes. I enjoy taking minutes and am taking steps towards improving my skill in this area. I am reviewing notes taken and distributed by others, noticing the various formats and have begun adding in my notes a section for ‘Decisions’ and ‘Assignments.’ I also really like the way a senior staff person writes up meeting notes and have asked her if she would share her tips with me. I am also volunteering to take meeting notes whenever I can so I can get more practice.”

DO NOT pick a weakness that relates to your personality or character (example: “Sometimes I get impatient with people”). Character flaws are generally perceived as unfixable and employers will likely view them as a “problem” versus a weakness.



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WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS POSITION

Identify what you know about the organization, how your background or goals match, and what you can uniquely bring to the position. Your response should be based on your homework about the organization and the position. Remember that you will be competing with others and you need to make sure your response stands out. This is not the time to say, "I am tired of what I do," or "I don't like the people I work with and need a change," or "This job is only five minutes from home."

ASKING A QUESTION AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview, you may have the opportunity to ask questions. This is your chance to demonstrate your interest in the job and the organization. Take this opportunity and use it to your advantage.

If you have done your research about the organization, you may be able to ask a highly focused question that demonstrates your knowledge. A more general question you can use may be "What do you see as the greatest challenge for the person coming in to this job in the next twelve months?" or "What is management goal for this position in relation to the overall organization's goals?" "How does this position fit into the rest of the organization?"

The question should be about the job or organization. Below are examples of questions you should not ask:

- Can you tell me what this job does?
- Can you start me at a higher step?
- Can I get a flexible schedule?
- When will I be able to use my vacation time?

OFFER YOUR PREPARED REFERENCE DOCUMENT

Before you leave the room, inform the panel members that you prepared a document with your references and ask if they would like a copy. Some agencies will use the application information for references and do may not need the list you offer. You may want to ask the human resources office if you need to provide references prior to developing the reference list.



WHEN GIVEN A TOUR OR SPENDING TIME AT THE COMPANY AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Once the official interview is over and someone offers to provide you a tour or you are invited to return to spend time observing operations, continue to treat the experience as part of the interview process. Be careful of talking too much about yourself and revealing personal information you normally would not share during the interview. Stay professional and ask job related questions.



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POST INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP



SEND A THANK YOU NOTE

If you choose, send a thank you note or email to the panel members within a day. Your note should simply express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview, how much you enjoyed meeting the panel members and a reaffirmation of your continued interest in the position. Be sure to spell their names correctly. Do not take this opportunity to provide them with additional information regarding the questions asked in the interview. The interview is over.

FEEDBACK

Request a feedback session with the Human Resources representative responsible for the recruitment. The representative should provide you with an honest assessment of how you did in the selection process, including positive feedback and recommending areas for improvement.

- Be respectful when requesting feedback. Keep in mind this is a courtesy, not a requirement.
- Be willing and listen and hear the feedback
- Ask how you can improve for future opportunities
- Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal communications during this session

KEEP ALL OF YOUR APPLICATION MATERIALS

These materials will be helpful for future opportunities.