

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Congratulate yourself—your résumé showed you had the skills necessary to do the job, and you have landed an interview!
- ✓ Think about your strengths, interests, values, abilities and skills, and how they fit with the job you are interviewing for.
- ✓ The interview is as much about the job being a good fit for you as it is you impressing them—think carefully about whether the job and company culture are right for you.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Researching the Company

You should take the time to research the company because it:

- Provides you with general knowledge about the company
- Allows you to learn information specific to the position within the company
- Gives you the ability to ask informed questions
- Provides you with more knowledgeable and intelligent answers
- Gives you insight into whether or not you would want to work for the company

The resources you can use are: MU Career Center, current employees, professors, websites, company annual reports, Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, stock brokers, or publications such as *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.

Preparing for the Interview

Make several copies of your résumé and references. You should keep these copies in a professional notebook or padfolio. This will demonstrate to the interviewer that you are prepared.

Have a pen and paper handy. Do not take notes during the interview. Immediately following the interview, write down as much as you can remember, including your feelings and impressions. After a number of interviews, you will be glad you didn't trust your memory to remember everything. Be sure to write down the name(s) of your interviewer(s) for thank you notes.

Don't bring in a pile of exhibits or samples unless asked.

Although, if relevant, a few samples of your work can demonstrate the skills you possess and show that you are prepared.

Have questions prepared to ask the interviewer. When asked for comments or questions, have several ready. This demonstrates that you are prepared and interested.

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Planning Ahead

Know your own goals, interests, and abilities. This will not only help you find a job that is a good fit for you, but it will make you much more attractive to the employer. Practice answering some of the questions from this handout. This will help tackle nervousness and provide confidence during the interview.

Know the interviewer's name and how to pronounce it. You should use Mr. or Ms., unless they specify otherwise. Be familiar with the company's major products or services, the organization of the company and its major competitors.

Dress appropriately. Be ready to dress in either business casual or business professional attire. For more information, check out the MU Career Center's website.

Familiarize yourself with the location of the interview. Make sure you know what building, floor, and room number the interview will take place. If you are unfamiliar with the area, it is a good idea to drive past the location and time your drive a day or two beforehand.

For more information, check out our *Guide Dining Etiquette*.

Practice, practice, practice! Interviewing is a skill that can be learned, but like any other skill, it takes determination, care, practice, and coaching. Consider scheduling a Mock Interview through the MU Career Center!

Be on time. This means 10-15 minutes early.

THE INTERVIEW

Interviewing Tips

Watch your non-verbal communication. Pay attention to your physical posture. Maintain appropriate eye contact (don't stare). Sit at a reasonable distance from the interviewer and feel free to place your chair at an angle in order to get comfortable.

Don't be embarrassed by nervousness. Interviewers are probably nervous too. In fact, nervousness is a good sign—it shows that you are taking the interview seriously. However, try to avoid nervous mannerisms like tapping your fingers, swinging your leg, or playing with your rings/hair.

Emphasize the positive. Act natural and dwell on the positive. Be frank and honest, but never apologize for lack of experience or weaknesses. Be self-confident. Don't be modest—this is your time to shine and show how great you are.

Don't exaggerate or lie. It will come back to haunt you.

Avoid Debate. Arguing with an interviewer will shorten the interview...and negatively affect your chances of employment.

Be sure you understand the question. Feel free to ask for clarification.

Follow the interviewer's lead. Don't try to take over the interview. Stick to the subject at hand but don't dwell on one point for too long. It is better to deal with many questions rather than spending a lot of time on just one or two in-depth questions unless that is where the interviewer leads.

Don't interrupt the employer. A few interruptions are natural, but keep these to a minimum.

Be prepared for personal questions, even some inappropriate ones. Some interviewers may not be aware of what they can legally ask. Anticipate how you will handle personal questions without losing your cool. If an interviewer asks a question that you are uncomfortable answering, try to address the concern behind the question.

Pay attention to the timing of your answers. It is more beneficial to wait and respond with thought and clarity than to reply too quickly and falter.

Don't try to give the answer they want. Most recruiters and employers know a "set answer" when they hear one.

If you catch yourself making an error or contradiction, correct yourself. It's better to stumble than to get caught later.

Watch your grammar. Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves properly. If you have to slow down to correct yourself, do it.

Don't expect an offer on the spot. Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. If, by a fluke, you would be offered the position on the spot, it is appropriate for you to ask for one or two days thinking time before responding.

Wait for an offer to talk about salary. Let the interviewer bring up this subject.

Be enthusiastic! Showing enthusiasm and interest in the job can make the difference.

Never slight a former employer, colleague, teacher, or institution. If there were problems with previous experiences, try to put your answer in the positive rather than the negative. If you slight a former employer, the interviewer may assume that you will someday do the same to him or her.

Be yourself. You don't want to get hired on the basis of something you are not. You want to be hired for who you are: You!

What the Interviewer Is Looking For

Communication and Interpersonal Skills: According to recruiters and employers, the ability to communicate effectively with others and get along with a variety of different types of personalities are two of the most desirable qualities in job candidates.

Enthusiasm: It's not just enough to have the right qualifications; an employer needs to know that you are willing to give 100% to your job. Candidates who are alert, responsive, and energetic tend to impress interviewers.

Adaptability and Flexibility: Employers need to know that the people they hire can expand and change as their companies do. Applicants who are receptive to new ideas, concepts, and situations are highly valued by employers.

Leadership: Even in entry-level positions, employers look for leadership qualities. Successful companies need self-starters who are willing to take responsibility for doing the best job possible.

A High Energy Level: A job candidate's willingness to work hard matters a great deal. Employers want to know that you are committed to devoting the prime hours of your day to the job.

Maturity and a Positive, Professional Attitude: An elusive quality that employers usually mention in connection with first job hires, maturity essentially means knowing how to handle yourself in a business situation. Misplaced humorous remarks, giggling at inappropriate moments, or being indiscreet about company information are telltale signs of immaturity.

Analytical Skills: The ability to problem-solve and think on your feet is becoming more and more valuable to employers.

Great Personality: Once you have advanced to the interview stage, you more than likely have the minimum qualifications for the job. Don't be surprised if it comes down to whose personality fits better with the culture of the company!

Decent Grades: Recruiters often use GPA criterion as a way of screening out a large number of job candidates. Some employers might assume that good grades indicate that the applicant is motivated; however, do not let this discourage you. Use the interview to demonstrate to the employer that your GPA on your transcript or résumé does not reflect your abilities.

Well Rounded: Employers want employees who not only possess many skills, interests, and abilities. but also have hobbies and interests that will help keep stress levels down!

Related Work Experience and/or Transferable Skills: Although you may not have experience directly in the field that you wish to be employed, do not worry, and simply emphasize what you can do for the organization. This means emphasizing your transferable skills. Employers are concerned most with what you can do for them. Focus on your ability to learn quickly and easily, communication skills, interpersonal abilities, analytical thinking talents, and other skills developed while in college.

For more information, check out our *Guide to Transferable Skills*.

Initiative, Ambition, and Motivation: Signs of initiative are very compelling for the interviewer. The ideal employee knows when to take action without prodding by management.

Creativity and Intelligence: Are you innovative? People who are constantly thinking of new ways to accomplish tasks make perfect job candidates because they can improve the status of a company.

Teamwork Skills: Many occupations now require that you be able to work with a team of other individuals to work toward a common goal.

Dependability and a Strong Work Ethic: Employers need the security that you are going to be a reliable employee; therefore, they will be drawn to individuals that are dependable, responsible, trustworthy, motivated, and consistent in their job performance.

Job-Person Fit: Employers are not only looking for individuals who have skills and experience; they also want individuals who will fit well within the organization and position. Employers desire employees who want to work for them. Moreover, you should also desire working for an employer who wants to hire you. Remember you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you.

A Reason Not to Hire You: You have many more chances to talk your way out of being hired than you have of impressing the interviewer. Be careful of what you say and take extra time to respond to difficult questions if necessary, but don't be so careful that you end up not being true to yourself!

Consistent Questions and Answers: Make sure that your answers do not contradict each other.

Also, Remember to Have: A good handshake, appropriate eye contact, appropriate body language, and appropriate attire, knowledge of the company and position, and clarity of career goals.

What the Interviewer is NOT Looking For

- A “know it all” attitude.
- Lack of career planning.
- Lack of confidence and poise.
- Poor scholastic record.
- Excuses.
- Evasive behavior.
- Condemnation of past employers.
- Limp, fishy, or crushing handshake.
- One word answers.
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm.
- Inability to express oneself clearly.
- Poor research prior to the interview.
- Over emphasis on money.
- Unwilling to start at the bottom.
- Failing to look interviewer in the eye.
- Poor personal appearance.
- Babbling on and on and on.
- Lack of tact and/or courtesy.
- Ill-mannered behavior.

Non-Verbal Communication

Although what we say in an interview provides the content by which your verbal communication and knowledge are judged, non-verbal communication can be even more powerful. Non-verbal messages often contradict what we say in words. When we send mixed messages or our verbal messages don't jive with our body statements, our credibility can crumble.

Non-verbal communication can include everything from what we wear to how much we look at the interviewer in the eye and in what manner. The way you walk in, the way you sit, and facial expressions you make can have a profound effect on how you come across to an interviewer.

Also, non-verbal communication will make up a large part of your greeting and first impression. Make sure to offer your hand for a handshake before you sit down. Keep your handshake firm, but not crushing. Curl your fingertips around the interviewer's hand for a complete shake. The interviewer will form an opinion about you within the first 3 minutes of the interview!

Body Language Doesn't Lie. Your body language speaks volumes about your attitude and how you would perform at a company. In fact, some experts say nonverbal cues are more important than verbal ones. A significantly meaningful aspect of communication lies in body language. Body language is so important that it frequently overshadows what we say. Since it's more spontaneous and less controlled, body language shows our true feelings and attitudes.

Confidence. Confident applicants have relaxed, balanced postures. They hold their body upright, walk freely with their arms swinging, and take determined strides. Less-assured candidates, on the other hand, have rigid or stooped postures, drag or shuffle their feet when walking and take short, choppy strides. When your movements are coordinated with your words, you'll be more confident, expressive, and controlled.

Nervousness. Gestures that exhibit nervousness include clenching or wringing your hands; holding your legs or arms tensely; perching on the edge of a chair; or playing with a watch or ring conveys stress.

Eye Contact. Maintaining good eye contact signifies openness and honesty. A candidate who avoids eye contact can be taken as showing a lack of confidence or nervousness. Less-assured candidates don't maintain eye contact, act shy or ashamed, or smile at inappropriate times. They may appear downcast or pleading, or drop their eyes and heads, giving them an untrustworthy appearance. Remember that there is a distinct difference between staring at someone and making proper eye contact! Maintain enough eye contact to show your interest in the position and the interview, but not enough to make the interviewer feel uncomfortable.

Interviewer Non-Verbals. Be cognizant of interviewers' expressions as well. If they don't maintain eye contact, it may mean they're anxious, irritated, disinterested, or that they want the conversation to end. An interviewer who looks up may be uncomfortable, trying to remember something, or doesn't believe your answer.

Types of Interview Questions

There are several different kinds of questions you may encounter in your interview. Common types are:

Direct. Questions that require a specific answer, often just a one or two word answer like yes or no. Try to expand on your answer if possible. Some examples follow:

1. Are you willing to relocate?
2. Are you willing to travel?
3. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
4. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
5. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
6. Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
7. In addition to the literature we sent out, what other sources did you use to find out about our company/organization?
8. What percentage of your college expenses did you earn?

Open Ended. Questions that do not have one specific answer. They provide the interviewee an opportunity to expand and communicate more about what their experiences have been and what they hope to offer a prospective employer. A one-word response is generally not appropriate for open-ended questions. Some examples follow:

Personal Information

1. What do you consider to be your greatest strength(s)?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?
4. Why should I hire you?
5. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in (_____)?

Expectations and Personality traits questions

1. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
2. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
3. What two or three things are most important for you in your job?
4. What is your geographical area of preference?
5. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
6. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
7. How do you work under pressure?

Goals

1. What are your long range and short range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next 10 years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What do you really want to do in life?
5. What are your long-range career objectives?
6. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
7. What do you expect to be earning in five years?

Education

1. Why did you select your college or university?
2. What led you to choose your field of major study?
3. What college subjects did you like the best? Least? Why?
4. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently?
5. How has your college experience prepared you for a career in _____?
6. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
7. What changes would you make in your college or university experience? Why?
8. What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?

Experience

1. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
2. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
3. What have you learned from your mistakes?
4. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

Motivation

1. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
2. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
3. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
4. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
5. How do you determine or evaluate success?
6. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?

Company Knowledge

1. Why did you seek a position with this company?
2. What do you know about our company?
3. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
4. In what ways do you think you can contribute to our company?
5. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

Additional Questions

1. What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
2. What is a weakness you have and what are you doing to correct it?
3. What does success mean to you?
4. What qualities do you admire in others?
5. What were the three most important events (decisions) in your life?
6. Are you a leader? Give me examples.
7. What do you do in your leisure time?
8. Tell me about accomplishments in which you take pride.
9. What magazines or books do you read? Why?
10. What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your chosen field?
11. What are your career goals?
12. How does your education relate to our needs?
13. What position in our company interests you the most?
14. Why do you want to work for us?
15. How long do you intend to stay with our company/organization?
16. What are the disadvantages of this field?
17. What has annoyed you about people that you have worked with?
18. What have you learned from your past jobs?
19. How do you handle criticism?
20. How often, and in what way, did you communicate with your subordinates and superiors?
21. What kinds of professors did you like? Why?

Behavioral Questions are a newer style of questioning that more and more companies and organizations are using in their hiring processes. The basic premise behind behavioral questioning is this: *The most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation.* Traditional interviewers ask general questions such as “Tell me about yourself.” The process of behavioral questioning is much more probing and tries to pinpoint certain characteristics.

Important Tips on Behavioral Questioning. Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job opening and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. To assess which skills the employer is seeking, talk to alumni, read the company literature carefully, and listen closely during the company's information session. If you did not have these kinds of opportunities, go back to page 2 of this packet and review the section on researching the company. In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a *specific* situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Frame your answer in a three-step process:

- 1) Situation (the circumstances involved in the story)
- 2) Action (what you did in this situation)
- 3) Result/Outcome (what happened as a result of your actions)

Always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely.

Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations where you have demonstrated the behaviors sought by a company.

Your résumé will serve as a good guide when answering questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internship, classes, activities, team involvement, community service, and work experience.

Examples of Behavioral Questions. These are often difficult questions to answer without preparation. Use a separate sheet of paper to jot down examples of stories in your past that you would use to answer these questions. Careful preparation is the key to an effective behavioral interview.

1. Give an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell about your success in reaching it.
2. Give an example of a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
3. Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
4. Tell me about a time when you had to go beyond the call of duty in order to get a job finished.
5. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
6. Describe an instance when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
7. By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
8. Give a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
9. Describe the most significant or creative presentation which you have had to complete.
10. Give an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Discriminatory Questions are types of questions that are protected by federal, state, and/or local laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin or citizenship, ancestry, medical condition, physical handicap, marital status, arrest record, group affiliations, and age.

Any questions that may address these protected categories are unlawful. Please note that although federal law protects many of these, some laws still vary from state to state and region to region.

Three of the most common ways to handle these questions-

- Answer the question. This is generally the easiest way to handle the situation, but not always the most appropriate. Only answer the question if you feel comfortable doing so.
- State that you do not see the relevance of the question and do not answer. This is generally the most confrontational response, possibly even creating unwanted tension with the interviewer.
- Answer the question by responding to the concern that is behind the question being raised. Although not as easy as answering the question, if the interviewee is not comfortable answering the question, this is the best way to respond. Two examples of this follow.

Question: Do you plan to have any children?

Question behind the Question: What priority are you placing on this position? How dedicated will you be?

Answer: My dedication to my career has always been the highest of priorities whether or not I decide to have a family. In my previous position...

Questions that you might ask an employer are very important and show that you are interested in the job. Remember - never ask a question that you can easily find the answer for!

1. What kinds of qualities do you usually look for?
2. What sort of person are you looking for to fill this position?
3. Can you tell me about your own experience with the company/organization?
4. What have you liked most and least about working for _____?
5. What happens during the training program?
6. What was your first job in your career?
7. What does it take to advance in your field?
8. What aspects of your job provide you with the most satisfaction? The least?
9. Has your company hired Missouri graduates before? How have they done?
10. How do you rate your competition?
11. What do you consider to be your organization's three most important assets?
12. What do you see ahead for your company/organization in the next ten years?
13. What are your plans for expanding the _____ department?
14. Is this a newly created position or is someone being replaced?
15. What is the person who previously held this position doing now?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Be sure to send a thank you note to everyone who interviewed you as quickly as you can. Double check to find out where you should send the thank you notes.

Your note should be brief but enthusiastic, thanking them for the opportunity to interview and mentioning that you look forward to hearing from them soon about the position. You might include a short tidbit you may have shared over the course of the interview, like how you enjoyed discussing their current growth into a new market or if you shared being alums from the same university.

Lastly, in some cases an email thank you note might be more appropriate, such as for a large corporation or if you need to get a note to them immediately (if, say, they are making decisions the next day). For smaller businesses or non-profit organizations, for example, a hand-written note might be better.

THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

A phone interview follows many of the same principles of any other interview, but there are some differences. Some of the following was modified from <http://www.microsoft.com>.

Before the Interview

Practice. Have a friend or family member conduct a mock interview and record it so you can see how you sound over the phone. You'll be able to hear your "ums" and "uhs" and "okays" and you can practice reducing them from your responses. Also, anticipate typical questions, rehearse answers in advance, and have them handy for reference.

Lose the distractions. Find a nice, comfortable, and quiet place for your phone interview. If applicable, let your roommate know you have an interview and not to disturb you. Avoid busy locations like coffee houses and restaurants. Do not try to talk while driving in your car; you'll only get flustered. If the suggested time is not convenient for you to ensure that you are in a quiet location, ask the interviewer to reschedule. Put away phones, gum, cigarettes, and food.

Don't forget your résumé. Print out a copy of your résumé to refer to while answering questions. Don't speak directly from your résumé during the interview; your résumé provides a concise summary for you to ensure you don't forget any highlights in your experience.

Prepare a cheat sheet. Prepare a few sentences around prominent events in your own experience. Highlight your competencies and innovative ideas you have for the job that you want to make sure the interviewer hears. This is your own personal "cheat sheet" so you don't forget key points you want to make. You should still let the interviewer drive the discussion and direction of topics, but talking points will help you sneak in some of your own flavor, when applicable.

What's the job? Research the company, division, and job for which you are interviewing. Print out the job description for which you are being considered. If no job description is available, think about what your ideal job in the company would be or how you think you could best contribute given your skills and interests. Type up these ideas and print them out.

Do you have any questions? Write down two to three questions you would like to ask ahead of time.

Other preparations. Be well rested, mentally focused, and have a positive attitude before talking to the employer. Know if you are calling the employer or if s/he is calling you. Have a notepad and pen close by to take notes. Keep a glass of water handy. Be sure that all personal issues are resolved before the interview; you shouldn't stop the interview for any reason.

During the Phone Interview

Start the interview strong. If you call the interviewer, be nice and courteous to everyone you speak to. From the beginning, be aware of the way you talk to the interviewer. Ask who is in the room when you start, as there could be multiple people on the other end of the phone; write their names down to be sure you know who is talking. Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name). Only use a first name if they ask you to.

Be aware of your verbal communication. In a phone interview, all you have going for you is your verbal communication skills. This includes your vocal inflection, tone, wording, overall pleasantness, and the way you answer questions. Speak slowly and enunciate clearly. Listen carefully to the interviewer; s/he can tell if you are distracted. Smile during the interview; the interviewer can tell. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.

Get outta that chair! Try standing up and even walking around a bit during a phone interview. People tend to speak more clearly and confidently when standing.

Focus on solid answers. Answer questions honestly and provide detail for the interviewer. At the same time, be as brief as possible to avoid rambling and to keep the conversation flowing.

Take notes. Take minimal notes during the interview. Briefly jot questions down while being asked, and then if you forget the question in the middle of your answer, it's still right in front of you! This will allow you to answer questions completely.

Use common sense. Overall, treat the phone interview like a face-to-face interview. Don't interrupt the interviewer. Take your time; it's acceptable to take a moment to collect your thoughts.

End the interview on a good note. Close the interview strongly. You can ask the interviewer the next step for you to take.

After the Interview

Complete your notes. Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.

Follow up with the employer. Follow with a thank you note that reiterates your interest in the job. Remember that your goal is to set-up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer, ask if it would be possible to meet in person.

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Call the MU Career Center to schedule a mock interview.
- ✓ Visit our Handouts link on <http://career.missouri.edu/resources> to download other handouts in our Job Search Preparation series.