

Interviewing Skills Guide for Students

fall 2011 – spring 2012

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Interviewing Skills

The purpose of the interview is to get a job offer. Interviewing is usually the second stage of the job search process. Remember that you are not only trying to get a job offer but **you** also need to assess if this employer/position is the right position for **you**. You need to evaluate the employer and the position. Interviews are a great opportunity to determine if you will fit within a particular organization. An interview is a two-way conversation where both parties are examining the positives and negatives of entering into a contractual relationship.

Learn as much as you can about the company and position you are applying for.

- You need to have a basic understanding of the company, services and/or products they provide, business practices, industry trends, recent news or company changes and company culture.
- Research the company's web site, network with contacts you may have within the company and research employer databases such as Hoovers.com.
- If possible, try to obtain a complete job description prior to the interview. If this is not possible, search for similar positions using the Occupational Outlook Handbook or O*Net. Both of these are web-based systems and you can look up information by job title and/or industry.

Practice interviewing with the Career Services Office staff, friends, family members or by yourself.

- A well-prepared interviewee spends time practicing responses to questions. There is a standard set of questions that most interviewers will ask.
- Review and rehearse your responses. This will make you feel more comfortable during the interview.
- A style of interviewing that employers currently use is **behavioral-based interviewing**. The interviewer will ask questions that require the respondent to use actual examples of past behaviors. For example: "Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to complete a task or project." Think about past experiences, both job and internship experiences, and be prepared with examples about leadership, conflict management, interpersonal skills, initiative and motivation.

Be prepared to answer questions by employers and be prepared to ask questions as well.

- Evaluate your interests, skills and abilities as they relate to the position. This will help you in answering questions.

STAR Behavioral Interview Format

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. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
Action you took	Describe the action you took and be sure to 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 you achieved	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Examples of (STAR) Behaviorally-Based Interview Questions

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- 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.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).

Tips from Employers

Predictors of Success When Interviewing

- Ability to communicate clearly and concisely
- Demonstrated teamwork skills
- Demonstrated leadership skills
- Demonstrated problem-solving skills
- Career-related work experience
- Involvement in campus or community activities
- Ability to identify and give good examples of transferable skills
- Knowledge of the organization
- Asking good questions
- Flexibility
- Enthusiasm
- Ambition and motivation
- People skills
- Good grades
- Professional Appearance

Knock-out Factors

- Poor career planning
- Lack of qualifications
- Inability to express oneself clearly
- Insufficient evidence of achievement
- Failure to research organization
- Showing a lack of interest in the organization
- Unwillingness to relocate
- Appearing overbearing, overaggressive or conceited
- Seeming to be interested only in money and benefits
- Failure to follow up after interview

QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

Be prepared for your job interviews by practicing responses to the following questions. However you should not memorize answers and do avoid giving rote responses. Instead, develop outlines of major points or themes you want to emphasize during the interview. Please note that some questions fall into multiple categories and are repeated. Also, the interview questions below tend to be typical questions but are not all-inclusive.

On Leadership Skills

- What was your greatest leadership accomplishment?
- Describe a situation where you had to motivate others.
- Describe an example of personal leadership.
- Are you a leader?
- In a particular leadership role you had, what was the greatest challenge?
- Describe your leadership style.
- Describe a leadership role of yours and tell me why you committed your time to it.

On Communication Skills/Team Orientation/Customer Service

- Are you competitive?
- Have you ever had to compete for something and won?
- What is the best way to deal with an irate customer?
- Rate yourself from 1-3 on customer service, sales and management.
- When and how did you deal with a difficult customer?
- Describe a time when you had to deal with an overly difficult customer.
- Tell me about a time when you went the extra mile to get the job done.
- What is the biggest risk you have ever taken?
- Talk about a time when you were unable to convince someone of something. What did you learn from that experience and what would you do differently next time?
- Describe a time when you persuaded another about an idea you had.
- What is the difference between good customer service and excellent customer service?
- Describe a situation where you provided excellent customer service.
- What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
- Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud of your contribution?
- We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?

On Personality/Character

- If you could be any animal, what would you be?
- What motivates you?
- Talk about a time when you went the extra mile.
- If you new a customer or fellow employee was being dishonest, how you handle this?
- Tell me about a project you initiated.
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What else should I know about you?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with the pressure?
- What was the most useful criticism you ever received and who was it from?
- What frustrates you most?
- Give an example of a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.

On Talking About Yourself

- Tell me about yourself.
- Who is _____?
- What makes you special (unique, different)?
- What five adjectives describe you best?
- How would you describe your character?
- How would you describe your personality?

On Conflict Management

- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it.
- Give an example of when you have disciplined a team/group member.

On Strengths and Weaknesses

- Tell me about how you perceive your strengths. Your weaknesses. How do you evaluate yourself?

On Short and Long Term Goals

- What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

On Company/Business Knowledge

- What do you know about our company?
- Why are you interested in this company/career field?
- Do you think your college education prepared you for a position with us?
- Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you did? What did you gain?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- What are your expectations of your future employer?
- Are you willing to relocate or travel as part of your career?

On Decision-Making

- How are you conducting your job search, and how will you make your decision?
- Why are you interested in our organization?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?

Behaviorally Based Questions

- Give an example of a problem you have solved and the process you used to solve the problem.
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- Take me through a project where you demonstrated _____ skills.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you have made.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to persuade another person to your point of view.
- What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
- What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences at Cazenovia College?
- How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?
- Who or what was the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?
- What were the biggest problems you have encountered in college? How have you handled them?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

When an employer asks if you have questions, you should be prepared with questions you can ask about the job. Asking questions demonstrates interest, allows more time to make a strong impression, and enables you to determine whether the job is really for you. All questions should be job related. It is imperative that you ask questions, if you don't the employer may assume you are not interested in the job or have not researched the company and/or position.

From Ron Fry's book, 101 Smart Questions to Ask on Your Interview

"It's okay to be a copycat...feel free to take some of the typical interview questions you should expect to be asked and ask them of the interviewer..."

- *What are the company's (department's) strengths and weaknesses?*
- *What was the last great challenge faced by the department? How did you and your team handle it?*
- *Can you tell me about a successful project and how you managed it?*
- *Can you tell me about some recent problems you have faced and how you (as a team) overcame them?*
- *What is your definition of success? What is your definition of failure?*
- *If you could change one thing about the way this department works (or is structured or is managed), what would it be?*

Other Questions to Ask:

- Why is this job available? Is this a new position? Was it created as part of a new project, division or strategy?
- If this is not a new position, can you tell me what happened to the person who previously held it?
- If they were fired, can you tell me why? If they were promoted, where did they end up?
- To whom would I be reporting?
- How long has this position been open?
- What can you tell me about the culture of the company? How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
- What specific skills and experiences would you ideally look for in the person filling this position?
- Given my qualifications, skills and experience, do you have any concerns about my ability to become an important member of this company?
- Could you tell me about some typical first-year assignments for a new or entry-level employee?
- What characteristics best describe the individuals who are successful in this position?
- Could you discuss how new employees are evaluated during the training period?
- What kind of training can a new hire in this position expect in the first three months?
- Could you outline some special projects which are currently on-going in your department?
- How does one advance in the organization?
- What is the greatest challenge your organization (or department you will be working in) faces during the next year?
- In what type of professional development activities do your employees become involved?
- What other positions and/or departments will I interact with the most?
- What impact might the economy have on my position in the next two to three years?
- What could you say are the biggest challenges this organization has?
- What changes do you anticipate in the next few years?
- What are the challenging facets of the job?
- Why do you enjoy working for your firm?
- Why did you decide to go with ABC Company?
- What has been your most rewarding work experience?
- When can I expect to hear from you?
- May have your business card?