

# INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

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*Interviews are designed to address three important issues: (1) to assess your qualifications; (2) to evaluate your personal qualities and attributes and determine if you are a good fit for the position; and (3) to answer your questions about the company or job.*

## **Before Arranging an Interview:**

- Know yourself (identify and articulate your skills, interests, goals and potential contributions to an organization). Career counselors in the Career Development office are available for one-on-one appointments if you are unsure how to identify your skills and strengths.
- Know the position (study the job description, research similar positions and gather average salary data).
- Know the company (research the organization's mission, goals, locations and future directions).

## **Preparing for an Interview:**

- Schedule a practice interview with the Career Development office to polish your interviewing skills.
- Rehearse answers to potential questions.
- Write down five to ten questions to ask the employer. For ideas, refer to the book *201 Best Questions to Ask in Your Interview*, available in the Career Resource Center on the main floor of Hekman Library.
- Select what you will wear to an interview.
  - Dress professionally and conservatively; be clean and well-groomed.
  - When possible, wear a dark-colored, two-piece business suit.
  - Refer to "The Best Dressed Candidates" handout at [www.calvin.edu/career](http://www.calvin.edu/career) for more details.
- Create a professional portfolio (if desired). Portfolios may include any of the following:
  - A few extra copies of your resume
  - A copy of your transcript(s)
  - Certificates of awards and honors; special certifications for special trainings
  - Samples of relevant papers or projects
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Letters of nomination to honors and academic organizations
  - Newspaper articles that address some achievement
  - Internship summary reports or projects
- Drive by the location where you will be interviewing so that you know how to get there, where to park, and whether there is road construction that could cause delays.

## **Arriving for the Interview:**

- Arrive early, but not more than 15 minutes.
- Leave your cell phone in the car.
- Carry with you only what is absolutely essential for the interview:
  - A leather folder, with a writing tablet, pen and your prepared questions for the employer
  - Extra copies of your resume and a typed list of references
  - Your professional portfolio if desired
- Enter the interview with a positive, confident attitude, even if you are nervous.
- Treat everyone you meet in the office with respect.
- Greet the interviewer by name and shake hands firmly.

### During the Interview:

- Be honest and be yourself.
- Answer all questions thoroughly, yet concisely. You should generally be able to keep your responses to two minutes or less.
- Use specific examples whenever possible to support your statements. For example, instead vaguely stating “I am a detail-oriented,” provide a real-life experience, such as “One of my strengths is managing a lot of details. This can be seen in the work I did as an orientation intern at Calvin, coordinating the schedules for 50 volunteer leaders and organizing small group activities.”
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s).
- Sit with good posture. Avoid nervous mannerisms such as tapping your fingers on the table or playing with your hair. Smile when appropriate.
- Ask questions when the employer gives you the opportunity.
  - Do not ask a question just to ask a question. Ask questions based on the research you have done about the position and company.
  - Do not ask questions about salary or benefits. Let the employer begin the salary negotiations.
- Before you leave, ask for a business card from each person in the interview.

### After the Interview:

- Take notes about what went well in the interview and how you can improve in the future.
- Send a typed or handwritten thank you note to the interviewer as soon as possible.
  - Thank the employer for his or her time and consideration, remind the employer of your unique qualifications and express your genuine interest in the position.
  - Send a note to each person who interviewed you.
- If you have not heard from the employer regarding the outcome of your initial interview by the date they indicated they would notify you, a follow-up phone call or e-mail is acceptable.

### Five Common Interview Questions and Suggested Response Strategies:

Question	Response Strategies
Tell me about yourself.	Give a <i>brief</i> history of your educational background and related work/internship experiences. State why you are qualified for the position.
Why are you interested in working for this company?	Provide specific reasons for your interest (e.g., type of company, job description, size of company). Demonstrate that you have done your research about the company.
Why should we hire you?	Before going to an interview, review the job posting and determine what you have to offer that fits with the requirements.  Summarize traits and accomplishments that make you unique and a good match for the job.
What is your greatest strength?	Before going to an interview, make a list of skills gained through past experiences. If you are having trouble identifying your unique skills or strengths, ask supervisors or professors who know you well what they consider to be your greatest strengths.  Mention positive traits that an employer would value and be prepared to provide specific examples of how you demonstrate those traits.
What is your greatest weakness?	Again, ask supervisors or professors who know you well what they consider to be your greatest weakness.  Offer a weakness and discuss action you have taken to overcome it (e.g., <i>I sometimes miss small details because I am more focused on the big picture, but I always make sure to work closely with someone who is detail-oriented</i> ).  Do not reveal a weakness that would disqualify you for the position.

## **Other Typical Interview Questions:**

### *Personal Assessment Questions*

- What are your short-range and long-range career goals? How are you preparing to achieve them?
- What do you see yourself doing in the future?
- What motivated you to choose the career field you are entering?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Which rewards are most important to you in your chosen career?

### *Educational Background Questions*

- Why did you select your college or university?
- What college courses have you liked best and why? What courses have you disliked and why?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your chosen career?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement? Explain.

### *Work History Questions*

- Tell me about some of your work experiences. What have you liked most, and what have you liked least? Why?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What qualities do you have that you think would make you successful in your chosen career?
- What kind of supervision style do you prefer?
- What two or three factors are most important to you in your job?

### *Behavioral-Based Questions*

*\*Note: Behavioral-based questions are becoming more common in interviews. Using this technique allows the interviewer to evaluate your past experiences and behaviors as a predictor of your future success.*

- Give me an example of how you have used your creativity to solve a problem on the job or in school.
- Tell me about a difficult situation you've faced (in school or work) and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when you failed. What happened, and how did you recover?
- Provide examples that demonstrate you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Talk about a time when you were working with someone who wasn't pulling his or her weight on a project. How did you deal with this person?

## **Questions to Ask Employers:**

- Can you describe a typical day in this position?
- What is the organizational structure, and who would be my supervisor?
- How is job performance evaluated, and how often?
- What have you like most, and what have you liked least about working with this company?
- When do you expect to make a decision about this position? Can you tell me the timeline for your hiring process?