

2017 Interviewing Guide

Hanover College Career and Professional Development Center

The Art of Interviewing

by Margaret Krantz

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Prepare!

Preparation can have an enormous impact on the success of an interview. If you are able to anticipate and prepare for possible questions, you are more likely to make a convincing case for getting the job. There are four main areas to concentrate on prior to your initial interview.

Know about the organization:

- Identify its principal clients or customers and primary products or services.
- Learn about the nature of the business, location, and names of contacts.
- Discover its basic philosophy and history (reputation, competitors, and organizational structure).
- Find out about its plans for the future.

Know about the specific job:

- Identify the specific tasks, skills, personality traits, education and training the job requires.
- Learn how the job fits into the corporate structure.
- Consider related jobs you'd enjoy.
- Research the salary range and hours.

Know about yourself:

- Assess your career goals and objectives and how you plan to achieve them.
- Summarize the reasons you chose Hanover and your major.
- Identify your functional skills and find examples of them in action. Thus, it is not enough to say that you have strong organizational skills; you should discuss the results of your skills: "I implemented a new filing system which allowed us to tell at a glance how current our files were."

- Identify your work values (what you need from a job and what you want to avoid on the job).
- Summarize your work experience, extracurricular activities, and course work as they relate to your career interests.
- Memorize your résumé; the interviewer will expect this.

Know about interviewing:

- Plan your strategy: list 3 – 4 points about your skills, experience, and interests that the recruiter should know. Think of stories of them in action. (See pages 6 and 7 to assist you.)
- Write down your answers to common questions, remembering to focus on those aspects of your background that correspond most closely with the needs of the job.
- Familiarize yourself with interview evaluation criteria.
- Learn about the various styles of interviews including behavioral, panel, series, individual, stress, and situational.
- Learn to listen carefully to questions, to answer clearly and precisely, citing examples, then to STOP.
- Practice!!
 - Read your answers to common questions into a tape recorder.
 - Practice answering questions before a mirror.
 - Have several friends, together and separately, interview you for a specific job.
 - Schedule a mock interview at the CPDC; have it videotaped and reviewed.
 - Treat each interview as if it were for your dream job.
 - Sign up to interview on-campus and at career fairs.

To find out more

Information about specific organizations can be easily obtained from the Internet. One of the best of many websites for this information is NACELink <https://hanover-csm.symplicity.com/students>. Additionally, the Duggan Library offers several electronic resources to enable you to search for company information via the Internet. Chambers of Commerce can supply information about the number of employees and primary products or services of many organizations. If you are unable to find details about the organization itself, search for data on its competitors or about the industry in general. Finally, the CPDC maintains a file of past interview questions.

Current Job Information

is available at O*Net (<http://onet.online.org>), the Career Resource Library. A couple of additional useful sites include the Occupational Outlook Handbook (<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>) and NACELink (<https://hanover-csm.symplicity.com/students/>).

Self-Understanding:

Methods of self-exploration available through the CPDC include individual career counseling; computerized self-assessment program; and career guidance references.

Interview worksheet

Career goals

List your specific career goals, including only those that are attainable with this particular employer. Include no personal or educational goals that are not relevant to this career path. If identifying your goals proves difficult, seek help from the Career and Professional Development Center.

Short-term (1-3 years) career goal: _____

Long-term (5-10 years) career goal: _____

Employer information

Nature of business/mission: _____

Location of headquarters and regional sites (if applicable): _____

Specific products or services: _____

Organizational structure (private, nonprofit, public, government, etc.): _____

Subsidiaries or parent company: _____

Competitors: _____

Current events in news/reputation: _____

Future direction: _____

Community involvement/corporate sponsorships: _____

Job qualification analysis

List 8 tasks you would perform in this job:
(<http://onet.online.org> can help.)

In what situation have you performed this task or another similar task? (List as many activities as possible for each and include results of your efforts wherever possible.)

Agenda

List 3-4 strengths of your experience, character or skills relative to this job:

Illustrations

Develop 2 illustrations of each of your agenda items. Develop them, using the behavioral interviewing guidelines on page 6 and worksheet on page 7.

Interview tips

No matter what position you're applying for, there are common ways in which you can prepare for your interview in order to boost your performance.

1. Do your research. You wouldn't go into a test unprepared and expect to do well. Treat an interview with the same determination to excel; approach each interview as if it were for your dream job. Learn everything you can about the position and the employer, then plan a strategy to sell the skills you most want to convey about yourself to this specific interviewer. Prepare examples of them in action.

2. Be on time, that is, ten to fifteen minutes early. Sometimes interviewers are ready to meet with you before the appointed time; they will consider your punctuality for the interview as an indication of your future work habits.

3. Know the interviewer's name and use it in the interview to personalize the conversation and add warmth.

4. Bring a copy of your résumé. The one you sent may not be available; this will demonstrate your preparedness. If you have examples of your work that can help to illustrate a particular skill, you may bring these as well.

5. Be sure you understand each question. If you are uncertain how to answer one, ask for clarification rather than guessing. Listen to the entire question before composing your answer in your mind; a brief silence before you answer a tough question is perfectly permissible, in fact, expected.

6. Respond concisely, but completely, to questions. Do not offer information unless it is pertinent.

If you are not sure you have answered sufficiently, ask the interviewer if you should elaborate. Remember, describing your skills is not bragging.

7. Watch your grammar. Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves articulately and properly. Even if you have to go slowly and correct yourself, accuracy is preferred over fluency.

8. Avoid negative terms and phrases. Instead of "problem", for example, say instead "challenge" or "opportunity."

**“Close” the interview
by asking for the job**

9. Never slight a former employer, teacher, institution, or friend even if invited to do so. Employers assume that if you complain about someone else, you'll complain about them.

10. Show you've done your homework. Discuss issues of importance to the recruiter. This will demonstrate your interest and allow you to share the professional jargon acquired when you researched the company.

11. Strive for a natural dialogue with your interviewer. Speak neither loudly or softly, neither rapidly or slowly. Allow him or her to set the tone and pace of your interaction. Do not take control of the conversation.

12. Do not be embarrassed by nerves. In fact, a little nervousness

may be a good sign; it shows you are taking the whole thing seriously, and the release of adrenaline often gives you energy and focus.

13. Try to discover the key details about the position as naturally as possible. It is important to address your comments to the ways in which your past experience and accomplishments will meet the company's needs. Further, you will need the information to decide whether or not you are seriously interested in the position.

14. Bring questions to ask them. It is very likely that interviewers will give you a chance to ask questions of your own, so prepare some based on your research of the organization, and based on the aspects of the job that are important to you. When asked for comments and questions, be sure to respond. Bring your questions in a portfolio.

15. Do not expect an offer on the spot. Offers usually follow a second or even third interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. You may ask when you should expect to hear from them and follow up if they haven't contacted you by then.

16. “Close” the interview by asking for the job, if you're interested in it. Say something like, "I have really enjoyed learning more about this position and am very interested in it. I hope you will consider me for it."

17. Be very careful at the end. More people blow an interview at the closing than at any other time (except for the opening). If you are not good at closing conversations, do not linger; end quickly and courteously. Allow the interviewer to open the door.

Typical interview questions

Most traditional interview questions can be divided into six main categories. If you plan general answers to each of them, you can adapt your answers to similar questions you may be asked during your interview. Remember, it is best to be honest, but focused on the job at hand, when answering each question.

1. “What are your strengths?”

While this question may sound frustratingly vague at first, it is really a great opening for you to focus on a few of your key qualifications for the job. Simply share your agenda (see page 3 of this guide) with illustrations (see pages 6 and 7) and you’ll have given the best answer you can.

Related questions:

- Why should I hire you?
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strength?
- What skills or qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful?
- In what ways do you think you can contribute to our company?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would a friend or professor describe you?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?

2. “What have you accomplished?”

In this case, the interviewer is asking for more specific detail than in number one. While you might respond with related personal characteristics to the question above, here you must describe a significant experience you’ve had. If you’ve used the worksheet on page 7, you’ll have 6 examples to draw from; choose the one that shows you in the most professional light.

Related questions:

- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?

- Do you think your grades are good indicators of your academic achievement?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- How has your education prepared you for a career?

3. “What are your weaknesses?”

This question is not meant to cause you embarrassment, but to reveal how well you know yourself, and how well you problem-solve. Everyone has weaknesses; are you aware of yours? Having recognized them, are you content to live with them, or have you tried to correct them? The most effective approach here is to choose a genuine weakness that is neither significant nor central to this job and that you have already overcome. If you outline the weakness and how you have successfully addressed it, you’ll cover all the bases the interviewer is concerned with, and look good as well.

Related questions:

- What do you consider to be your greatest limitation?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- Describe a situation where you made a mistake and what actions you took to correct the situation.
- What have you learned from your mistakes?

4. “What are your goals?”

This question trips up more students than any other. If you’re typical, you have a range of goals, both personal and career-related. The key here is to focus on your goals related to the job. Mention only your career goals that you can achieve through working at the position for which you are interviewing. Don’t mention personal goals ever, and only mention graduate school if it will help you to do the job more effectively.

Related questions:

- What are your 1-year, 5-year and 10-year goals?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- When and why did you establish

- your goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
- What do you want?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
- Why are you interested in this organization/institution and job?
- What interests you about this position? Would it continue to challenge you over a period of time?
- Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?

5. “How much are you worth?”

If at all possible, refer this question back to the interviewer: “I’m sure your pay will be fair. What range are you considering?” Still, you should have a figure in mind when you arrive. The CPDC maintains current salary information and offers resources to assist you with salary negotiations.

Related questions:

- What do you expect to earn in five years?
- What other offers have you had?
- What are your salary requirements?

6. “What else can you tell me about yourself?”

Anything you haven’t been able to cover from your agenda can be addressed at this point. Often wrap-up questions will follow. As always, answer honestly, but remember the interviewer’s purpose and perspective.

Related questions:

- What kind of supervisor and work environment do you prefer?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Do you enjoy working by yourself on projects or with people?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Why did you choose Hanover? Why did you choose your major? Do you plan to further your education?

Behavioral interviews

In “Behavioral Interviews” (sometimes referred to as “STAR” or “pattern” interviews), questions focus in detail on past behaviors and experience in order to best determine how the candidate will act in the future. This style of interview can be recognized by questions which begin:

“Tell me about a situation in which...”
 “Walk me through a time in your past in which you...”
 “Give me an example of a case when you...”, etc.

When a question is posed in this format, you are asked to give

considerable detail about your step-by-step approach to the skills being explored and the result of your efforts. Whether you have a question of this or a more traditional style posed to you, the most effective way to phrase your answer is to use a “STAR” response outlined below:

Phrasing a great STAR answer

Follow these steps:

S - (Situation) Describe clearly and briefly the situation and players involved. Make it clear what your role in the situation was.

T - (Task) Describe your evaluation of what the difficulty or challenge in the situation was, the task you were faced with.

A - (Action) What steps did you take to meet the challenge? List them clearly; this is the most important part of your answer to the interviewer.

R - (Result) What happened as a result of the steps you took? Discuss both short-term and long-term results. Do not omit this part of your answer.

As shown in this response:

(S) “Last year, as the philanthropic chair in my house, I explored various activities we might do. After I made a brief presentation to the members of my house, they enthusiastically chose to support Habitat for Humanity and we organized a weekend to build houses for Habitat. What I hadn’t counted on was that we would be undefeated in soccer last year, and that so many guys would want to attend soccer games.

(T) The weekend we had set with Habitat leaders turned out to be the last game of the season. Only four guys showed up to help. At that point I really thought the whole thing had failed, but I tried to make the most of it.

(A) So what I did was to take the guys who showed up down to the site so that we could learn the ropes. While we built the houses, we were able to talk to the people whose houses we were building. It turns out they were willing to come up to the house to talk to the guys, so I made another presentation at our next chapter meeting, this time with the home owners and the guys who had helped. We scheduled another building day for two weeks later, doubled the publicity, and scheduled for a day with few on-campus activities,

(R) and got a turnout of 25. The best thing is, this year, we were able to make Habitat the service project for all of the Interfraternity Council members and were able to build the new house in half the time it usually takes.

Question: “Tell me about a time in which a project that you were really committed to failed.”

Always use first person singular!

In giving your answer, be sure to describe your role as an active one, using “I” statements.

Typical STAR questions:

- Tell me about a situation in which your authority was questioned.
- What was the most difficult task you have had on the job?
- Give me an example of how you have overcome an obstacle.
- Tell me about a time that you were met with a technological difficulty.
- In what way have you had to deal with an irate customer?
- What would you do if the project you had been working on was rejected?
- What is a recent risk that you have taken?
- Tell me about your greatest accomplishment.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated people.

Behavioral interview worksheet

As you complete the interview worksheet on page 4, you will begin to get a sense of how well-suited you are for a position with this organization. You may recognize that activities you've done in the past have given you the skills you will need for this job; you may begin to develop the confidence that your personality is well-suited for it. The best way to

sell yourself in the interview is to focus on 3–4 strengths of your experience, character or skills that make you a good match for the job and then illustrate each with a STAR answer.

Because in an actual interview, you may inadvertently use an illustration of a particular strength in answer to a different question, you should

prepare two illustrations for each strength. Giving STAR answers is difficult; students often feel that they are bragging or boring the interviewer. That is not the case! If you follow the outline below, you will learn how to compose STAR answers that keep you focused on your point and provide the interviewer enough detail to decide you're the one they want to hire!

Strength # 1, Example 1 _____

STAR Situation/Task _____

Action Step 1: _____

Action Step 2: _____

Action Step 3: _____

Action Step 4: _____

Result: _____

Strength # 1, Example 2 _____

STAR Situation/Task _____

Action Step 1: _____

Action Step 2: _____

Action Step 3: _____

Action Step 4: _____

Result: _____

Identify two more strengths and develop two examples for each on a separate sheet.

Appropriate interview dress

Clothes play a major role in creating a professional image. It is most important to dress similarly to those currently employed by the organization, as people are more likely to be hired if they appear to fit in. Generally, wearing clothes one step more formal than those of current employees helps you to look both serious about and appropriate for the job. Therefore, if you have the chance, scout out the company to observe the style in which people dress prior to your interview. Dress professionally even to drop by to pick up an application. If you are not able to scout, during your research prior to the interview ask someone in the field how successful applicants dress for interviews. Generally, people who will be required to work with the public, with clients, or in a conservative field, such as the banking industry, tend to dress conservatively, with conservative hem lengths. Those working in more creative fields like advertising or computer systems analysis have a little more latitude for creativity in dress styles.

For career fairs and on-campus interviewing, wear a dark long-sleeved suit. Men should wear socks that match their suits, women should wear neutral-toned hose. Shirts should be white or a light color. Recent comments from on-campus recruiters indicate that most do not consider long earrings, obvious use of styling gel in hair, perfume, or cologne appropriate.

Non-verbal behaviors

Your poise, appearance, and behavior during the interview may affect the interviewer's hiring decision as much as what you say. Be aware of the following non-verbal behaviors during your job interview:

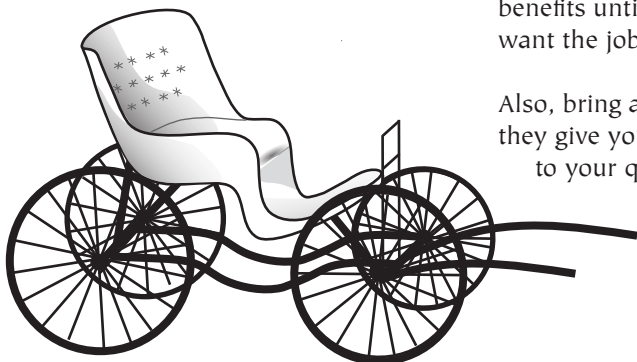
- Make and maintain eye contact, but don't stare.
- Shake hands firmly. If your hands are cold or sweaty, warm or dry them palm side down on your lap.
- Sit up straight in a relaxed pose. Do not lean sideways or backwards; do not touch or lean on the interviewer's desk.
- Speak clearly, using normal volume.
- It's a good idea to use humor or to smile when appropriate.
- Always let the interviewer finish speaking before composing your answer. Pause briefly if necessary before speaking.
- It is okay to cross your legs at the ankles or knees, but avoid resting one ankle on the opposite knee.

Ask great questions!

In some ways, an interview is like a carriage ride along a scenic parkway; the driver chooses the overlooks that are most interesting, opting to drive past some vistas while pausing to gaze at others. For most of an interview, the interviewer sets the pace, determines the direction of the conversation and decides how much time will be spent on a particular topic. If you want to do your best, you need to build rapport with the interviewer, anticipating the “vistas” that appeal to him or her. As you do your research before your interview (see tips on page 2), make note of the important events, new initiatives, etc., that matter to employees of that organization so that you can reflect that information in your responses.

Now you’re in charge!

At some point during the interview, generally at the end, the interviewer will turn to you and say, “Do you have any questions for me?” This is like the carriage driver handing you the reins: your response indicates the seriousness of your interest in the job, so answer carefully. If you say, “no,” it’s like driving off a cliff in the eyes of your interviewer. In effect, you’re saying, “there is nothing about this position that interests me.” Even if your questions were answered during the interview, you can recap them to show the interviewer what matters to you in deciding if you want to work for the organization. Your questions will demonstrate your enthusiasm, professionalism and initiative to the interviewer.



Bring them with you.

You should bring prepared questions with you written specifically for this recruiter. The best questions include the following:

- a request for information you really want (and can’t find by reading the organization’s web site),
- a demonstration of your knowledge of the organization based on your research, and
- a brief description of your own strengths relative to the question.

For example, “In preparing for this interview, I learned that Acme Bank has begun emphasizing sales at every level. This interests me, as I enjoy sales. How successful have you found your new strategy to be?”

On a clean sheet of paper, write (or print out) four good questions to bring to your interview. Adapt your questions to what you know about the organization or develop your own according to what you want to know in order to decide if the position is a good fit for you. The side bar to the right will get you started.

This isn’t a game.

When you ask questions, listen carefully to the interviewer’s response; not to do so is like driving the carriage with your eyes closed: your passengers won’t like it. If you don’t care about the information, don’t ask! Feel free to ask follow-up questions if appropriate.

Please Note:

DO NOT inquire about salary and benefits until the third interview; you want the job, not the pay (okay, both).

Also, bring a portfolio for any papers they give you, to give you easy access to your questions and to jot down their answers so that you can mention their responses in your follow-up thank you message.

For example

Find out some specifics.

Why is the job open, and what qualities are required to perform well in it? What type of problems do you encounter in this position, and how can I be a part of the solution? What would my first assignment be? How much choice would I have in projects? To whom would I report? Will I get to meet that person? Where is the job located? What are the relocation and travel requirements/opportunities? If there is a written job description, may I see it? How regularly do performance evaluations occur and what model do they follow? What is the work environment like?

Ask about your future.

What are the realistic chances for growth in the job? Where are the opportunities for greatest growth within the organization? How many people have held this position in the last couple of years? What was their next move? Why did you join the company or organization? How long have you been there? What is it that keeps you there? Will there be ongoing training opportunities?

Ask about the future of the company and the industry.

Demonstrate that you have done your homework. Be sure to focus on any current events that are impacting on the organization. Who will be the organization’s major competitor over the next few years? How successful is the organization? What are its opportunities or areas for growth? What about specific trends in the industry?

Follow-up letters

Take time to write a letter to your interviewer(s) within 48 hours of your interview. Occasionally, if a recruiter is having trouble choosing between two candidates, a well-written letter can be the deciding factor in one candidate's favor.

The letter should be brief:

- Limit yourself to no more than two-thirds of a page.
- Type the letter flawlessly, or find someone who can. A typographical error in your letter can undo your best interviewing efforts.
- Use business-letter format. Spell the recruiter's name correctly,

addressing a woman: "Dear Ms. Soandso."

- Sound like yourself (presumably, the interviewer knows who that is by now).
- Do not mention how you would benefit from having a job with this organization; recruiters are generally only interested in what you can do for them.

Include the following:

- Thank the recruiter for his /her time.
- Reaffirm your interest in the position and company, and how you are qualified for the job.

- Make it clear that you understood what was said during the interview.

If applicable:

- Include anything you omitted to say in the interview, but which will have bearing on the interviewer's understanding of your qualifications for the job.
- If you feel that you mishandled a question, this is an opportunity to clarify what you had meant to say. Word it carefully.

Again, take no more than 48 hours to mail your letter; it's well worth the effort.

517 Ball Drive, Unit #201
Hanover College
Hanover, IN 47243

November 16, 2017

Ms. Sharon McGrath
Acme Paper Company
1024 West Alphonse Boulevard, Suite 223
Madison, IN 47250

Dear Ms. McGrath:

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to interview with you yesterday on the Hanover College campus. I am well aware of the excellent reputation of Acme Paper in our region. I find your products to be of highest quality and am very interested in the position of sales manager as you outlined it to me.

As we discussed, my experience in being a resident advisor has given me strong management skills, while acting as philanthropic chair of my house has honed my skills in persuasion. I believe I would be an effective manager at Acme Paper from the first day.

I would like to add that I have served as a campus ambassador for the last three years, a position which involves talking with prospective students and their parents about the strengths of Hanover. This has provided me the opportunity to develop both my sales skills and my ability to communicate.

I am available for on-site interviews at your convenience, and look forward to hearing from you soon regarding your decision.

Sincerely,

Lindsay W. Pennywhistle
Lindsay W. Pennywhistle

On-site interviews

References are out; Screening tests are in

Employers are increasingly reluctant to provide traditional written references for current and former employees because their evaluative statements make them vulnerable to law suits. Today's referees may simply confirm that employees worked for them for specified dates with a specified job title. Because many employers no longer provide detailed letters of recommendation, they also no longer depend on references as a source of information about candidates.

Instead, it is now common for job candidates to be tested for targeted skills or traits. Nearly all candidates for entry-level jobs will have some type of testing prior to hire. Most of the tests recent Hanover graduates have experienced can be divided into three categories: inventories, often developed by industrial/organizational psychologists for that specific employer; knowledge assessments; and work trials. Below are examples of each.

Personality inventories:

- A list of adjectives from which you select those that describe you (e.g. Federated Insurance/Sales).
- Individually developed assessment of personality type needed in the field (e.g. Bank One of Kentucky/Bank Management).

Knowledge assessments:

- Test of cost analysis background using actual problems employees encounter (e.g. Toyota/Purchasing).
- Test of understanding of general accounting practices (e.g. Indiana State Board of Accounts/Accounting).

Work trials:

- Write a sample letter to a physician attempting to sell the product (e.g. Johnson & Johnson/Pharmaceutical Sales).
- Proofread twelve pages of text for errors in text and inconsistencies in style (e.g. Macmillan/Book Editing).

Phone and Skype

In many ways, phone and Skype interviews work the same way as other screening interviews. Your preparation, your agenda, even your dress should stay the same as if you were meeting in person. However, since nonverbal messages are more difficult to convey, you need to verbally express your interest.

Drug testing

Employers in many industries screen candidates for drug use. Most typically, they will request a urine sample from candidates at an on-site interview. Because this type of testing only detects recent drug use, some employers also require a hair sample of their candidates to screen for longer term drug use.

Your itinerary

Generally on-site interviews involve several steps, so it is wise to ask how long you should expect the interview process to take. You might see:

Human resources manager. Your first stop is in this office for a variety of possible purposes including to get your itinerary, to fill out an application, to take a test, and to discuss salary and benefits. (Don't bring the latter up if they don't.)

Vice presidents or other people at a higher level. You will probably meet with one or two of them for formal interviews.

The hiring manager. You will interview with the person who would directly supervise you.

Co-workers. Often this stage is less formal, over a meal or tour, to give you time to ask them questions.

Series style interviews

Some industries set up a series of interview stages for you to pass through in order to test your commitment to the profession. For example, in the insurance industry it is standard to require candidates to have as many as six contacts with the employer in order to get an offer, which (if you pass the sales aptitude screening test) is mostly a matter of tenacity. The stages might be as follows:

- 1) 30 minute on-campus screening interview with sales manager;
- 2) Sales aptitude screening test;
- 3) Meet with sales manager on-site, have a tour; see the office of a very successful agent;
- 4) Ride with a current agent to see actual clients;
- 5) Meet again with sales manager (your significant other is invited to participate and to ask questions);
- 6) Meet with the district manager.

Frequently asked questions

About interviewing

How should you handle questions that are uncomfortable or possibly illegal (e.g. marital status, plans to have children)?

By “illegal,” what we mean is that an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigation would find that your specific answer to the problematic question resulted in your not being hired. Because you may receive a job offer if you handle yourself well during the interview, it is better not to confront the recruiter about the question at that time; instead, simply answer the underlying question. For example, if the question were about your fiancé’s need to relocate, a simple statement indicating your plan to remain in the area indefinitely will handle their underlying question.

What sort of experience should a person not talk about during an interview?

You want interviewers to be able to see you as an effective employee in their organization; therefore, it is best to focus on skills and experiences that you’ve had that cast you in the role of a productive employee. The more your examples draw on responsible roles in employment settings, the better. Limit your references to any single specific extracurricular activity including athletics and greek ones. Avoid any activities that the dean of students would frown on.

What are the most important questions for me to ask?

The best questions for you to ask are those you truly want an answer to, that show you’ve prepared for the interview and that indicate you are trying to determine if this job is the best setting for you to use your skills. They are, thus, very idiosyncratic. See page 8 for advice on how to frame strong questions.

When asked a question such as “Have you ever worked with a difficult person?” how much detail should you go into?

It is best to avoid criticizing anyone in an interview even when you have been invited to do so. Instead, describe the things you have learned from those who approach things differently from you.

What is the #1 characteristic employers look for when interviewing?

Employers always hope that you will be the perfect fit for their position, but the requirements of the position determine what that means. A survey of employers indicated that the most highly sought traits were enthusiasm, dependability and punctuality.



What are some relaxation techniques to use prior to the interview to clear your mind?

There are a few techniques that may be helpful. First, just as actors depend on stage fright because it gives them adrenaline and energy, know that nervousness can help you focus in an interview. Still, to control nervousness, you might sit in a CPDC interviewing room and imagine yourself answering questions effectively. Posture can also affect nerves, so work to relax your shoulders and face. Because practice can help you to feel more confident, be sure to have a mock interview. During the actual interview, try to pace your breathing to the interviewer’s.

How do you deal with questions that ask about your weaknesses?

First, you should know that recruiters are not trying to embarrass you with this. Questions about weaknesses tell an employer how well you understand yourself and how well you can solve problems. If you can’t think of a weakness, they assume you have little insight into yourself. If you can name a weakness, but have done nothing to overcome it, they will question your ability to problem-solve. Therefore, the best approach is to describe the problem you have identified (one that is not central to the job you are trying to get) that you have already begun to address successfully.

How do you draw the line between bragging and just speaking of your strengths? When do employers look unfavorably on that?

“Bragging” is exaggerating your skills beyond what is accurate. Don’t exaggerate them, just describe them clearly. If you are a typical student, you will stop short of a complete answer, rather than going too far, when asked to sell yourself.

How do you deal with questions that you have no idea about?

Try to restate the question for them as you seek clarification. If you understand the question, but have no experience of the situation they are describing, you may say so and ask if you could substitute a related experience instead.

When do you talk about salary?

Wait until they bring it up. If they still haven’t done so by the third interview, you can ask them to give you a salary range. By the same token, don’t inquire prematurely about leave policies or other benefits, as you will convey to the employer that they are uppermost in your thoughts. Be prepared to give salary needs if asked.

Are you ready for lunch?

You have just received your itinerary for your company visit from “Company X,” the one from which you most wanted to receive a job offer. The schedule looks great: they are putting you up in the Westin the night before, breakfast on your own, then three interviews in the morning followed by lunch, and a meeting afterward with a personnel representative (probably to talk about salary, benefits, etc.,) which completes your visit.

Wait a minute. What was that about lunch? You were not expecting lunch. A number of worrisome thoughts begin to creep into your mind. Will I be interviewed during lunch? What will I order? Which way do you pass the rolls? My mother told me I would need to know these things some day. If only I had listened.

If you are unsure about what to do at lunch during your company visit, there is still some time to learn a few basic rules (or to be reminded of the ones your mother taught you) of business dining. It could well make the difference between getting that coveted job offer and being rejected because you do not fit into the company’s corporate culture. Here are a few tips to remember at a business luncheon:

1. Yes, you will be interviewed during lunch, at least informally. Even if they say you are not, consider it otherwise.
2. Place your napkin on your lap after everyone else has been seated. If you excuse yourself for a few minutes during lunch, place your napkin in your chair. Do not place your soiled napkin on the table until time for everyone to leave.

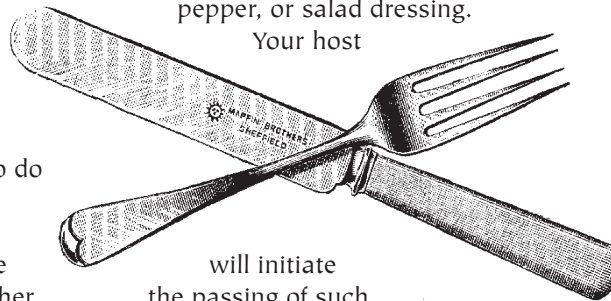
3. Since you will be a guest for lunch, ask the host what he recommends. By doing this, you will learn price range guidelines.

4. You should begin to eat only after everyone has been served and your hostess has signaled that you may do so by placing her fork or spoon on her plate.

5. If you have soup, move your spoon away from, rather than toward you! This will help you avoid dripping the soup on yourself. While oyster crackers or croutons may be placed in the soup, larger crackers should not.

6. Pass the rolls to the right. The same applies to other community foods like the relish tray, salt and pepper, or salad dressing.

Your host



will initiate the passing of such items. Wait for him to do so.

7. Rolls or bread should be handled in the following manner: break off a small piece at a time, butter it while it remains on your butter plate, then pick it up and eat it. Don’t butter it while it is in mid-air.

8. Never salt and pepper your food before tasting it, an insult to the chef. Also never request a bottle of meat or tomato sauce to cover the meat or fowl served you. Another insult to the chef! A tournedos of beef or filet mignon should not be treated as a hamburger.

9. Do not eat all of an item at once and then the next and the next. The idea is to appreciate the variety and

the intermittent sampling of flavors which comprise an enjoyable meal.

10. Cut only one piece of meat at a time and then eat it before cutting another. If you know how to eat “continental style,” feel free to do so. It is more efficient than the American method of switching implements from hand to hand.

11. It is appropriate to thank your server during the meal with a “thank you ” or a nod. These gestures will encourage better service, and you may be judged by your courtesy to subordinates.

12. While eating, balance your knife across the top of your plate, with the blade facing toward you, and leave your fork face up on your plate when not using it. A soup spoon should rest on the plate beneath the soup bowl when not in use. When the course or meal is finished, leave the plates in the same position in which they were presented to you. A properly trained waiter will be signalled that you are finished if you bring your knife and fork together to rest on your plate with their tips at the center of the plate (no longer balanced on the edge.)

13. Swallow food before you talk, even if it is slightly awkward to keep people waiting for your response to a question. Taking small bites can help you to avoid long delay.

14. Do not bite your utensil as you eat. Slide food off the fork with your lips, not your teeth, as teeth scraping against metal makes an unpleasant sound.

15. Choosing the proper implements is simple: always start with those farthest from the plate and work your way in. They should be set in order.