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Preparing for Job Interviews

Learn tips for handling Behavioral, Situational and Critical Thinking Interviews while selling yourself.

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The Career Connection

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THE CORNERSTONE OF YOUR FUTURE

The Interview

- *How to Prepare for the Interview*
- *Behavioral Interviewing*
- *5 Categories of Questions*
- *How to Market Yourself*
- *What to Wear*
- *What to Say*
- *Follow-up*

Preparing for Job Interviews

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Selling Yourself

WHAT TO SAY

- Introduce yourself with a smile and firm handshake. Maintain good eye contact during conversation.
- Demonstrate to the recruiter what you want to and can do for the employer today, based on employer research. Give two minute commercial.
- Answer questions with:
 - “Yes, for example (accomplishment/result statement)” and
 - “No, however (accomplishment/result statement)”
- Show interest in what the interviewer is saying, by nodding your head and leaning toward him/her occasionally.
- Give positive answers to negative-based questions.
- Ask the recruiter prepared questions.
- Initiate the next step by asking what the next step is.
- Ask for the recruiter’s business card for future contact. Immediately after you leave make notes of important points of discussion.

WHAT TO DO

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Use time wisely to review employer research information.
- Have pen and paper. Asking to borrow a pen indicates lack of preparation.
- Be enthusiastic. Recruiters remember a positive attitude.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer’s complete question before responding.
- If needed, pause and take time before answering difficult questions.
- Keep going even if you feel you made a mistake.
- Carry extra resumes, references, etc. organized in a portfolio.
- Unless asked, do not discuss salary and benefits.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a thank you letter to the recruiter.
- Address it to the recruiter, by name and title.
- Demonstrate employer knowledge in 2-3 sentences.
- Restate employment objective.
- Answer the question – “What can you do for them?” based on something specifically discussed during your contact. Use accomplishment/ results statements that demonstrate your ability to meet those needs.

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Preparing for an Interview

**Research the Employer – The more information you have about a prospective employer, the better prepared you will be during the interview. You need to know about the organization’s products, trends, and employment requirements. This is vital for interview preparation.*

Suggested information to review on the company:

- *Name, age, location, and number of plants, offices, and stores
- *Type of products or services
- *Growth history
- *Anticipated growth (current size within industry)
- *Current challenges (chief competitors)
- *Parent company
- *Subsidiaries
- *Major activity of company
- *Annual report (if they are publicly held)

Many information sources such as newspapers, industry publications and directories can help the job seeker in researching companies. You should be able to locate most of these in a public library. Some examples include:

- *American’s Corporate Families
- *Annual Reports
- *Chamber of Commerce Membership Directory (Local)
- *Dallas Business Journal
- *Directory of Business Information Resources
- *Directory of Corporation Affiliations
- *Dun & Bradstreet Business Information Reports
- *Employer’s Annual Reports
- *Fortune Magazine
- *Industry Magazines (Specific to your field)
- *MacRae’s State Industrial Directory
- *Million Dollar Directory
- *Moody’s Manual
- *Newspapers (Local)
- *Standard and Poor’s Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives
- *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers
- *Wall Street Journal

The Internet also provides a vast amount of resources for researching companies. Start with the resources found on the Career Center’s web site at: <http://careercenter.unt.edu>. Click on “Student/Alumni” and then click on “Employer Resources” under “Job Search and Interviewing Resources.”

What to Wear

Dress for Success – Wear clothing that indicates you are ready to go to work today. It is almost always better to be higher than the standard than lower.

Men & Women

- All clothes should be neatly pressed
- Conservative two-piece business suite (solid dark blue or gray is best)
- Conservative long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Clean, polished, conservative shoes
- Clean and well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets – no noisy coins
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

Men

- Necktie should be silk with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes (black lace-ups are best); clean and polished
- Dark socks (black is best)
- Short hair always fares best in interviews
- No beards – mustaches are acceptable (keep neat and trimmed)
- No earrings
- No heavy cologne

Women

- Always wear a suit with a jacket; or a sheath dress with a jacket
 - Do not wear extremely high-heeled or platform shoes
 - Do not wear open-toe shoes or mules (they are more casual)
 - Conservative hosiery at or near skin color (and no runs!)
 - If you wear nail polish (not required), use clear or a conservative color
 - One set of earrings only
 - Conservative makeup
 - No heavy perfume
 - No heavy cologne
-

Two-Minute Commercial

The two-minute commercial is designed to answer the first question most interviewers ask. “Tell me about yourself” It also allows the job seeker to share with the interviewer the most important thing they want to know – “Why should I hire you?”

The two-minute commercial is made up of four parts:

1. Personal and Education (15 seconds)

This part is used to give the interviewer relevant information concerning you personally and about your educational background. This does not include personal information such as marital status, children, etc. This does include information such as: hometown or state and/or personal attribute(s). The education should be either the latest obtained and/or major field if relevant to job objective.

2. Early Career/Life Experiences (15-30 seconds)

This part is used to share with the interviewer past work and life experiences relevant to the job objective.

3. Recent Work History/Life Experiences (45-60 seconds)

This is the most vital part of the two-minute commercial. This is the time for the job seeker to relate to the employer two accomplishments/results of the job seeker that indicate why he/she is the best candidate for the position sought.

4. Why you are here (15-30 seconds)

This is used either at the beginning or end of your two minute commercial, depending on the question asked by the employer. In this part, the job seeker speaks with enthusiasm that he/she is here for the specific position sought.

Example:

My degree is in finance and I will be graduating this December. While attending college, I worked 25 to 30 hours a week. I spent the last 4 semesters working in a cooperative education position for Hastings in their accounting and finance department. I was able to get “hands-on” experience in cost accounting, cash-flow analysis, budget development and assisted in preparing client proposals.

Through these job experiences, I have been given the opportunity to polish my customer service skills, as well as gain technical skills. I have strong planning and documentation abilities and am analytically oriented.

My career goal is to work for a bank and eventually become a loan officer. I believe I have the key traits for success in banking. I have good common sense, can juggle multiple tasks, have a positive attitude, and excellent communications skills. I think my greatest strength is my capacity to get along with a wide variety of people and personalities.

Preparing for an Interview

Here are five things that most employers want to know about you.

1. They want to know if you are qualified for the position.

- What are your greatest strengths?
- Do you have experience in this field?
- What do you believe you bring to this job?
- Why should I hire you?

2. They want to know what motivates you.

- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- What is more important to you, the money or the job?
- What did you like most about your last job?

3. They want to know about the negatives.

- Why did you leave your previous job?
- What did you like least about your last supervisor?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What did you like least about your last job?
- Why have you been unemployed so long?

4. They want to know if you are a good fit.

- What kind of people do you find it hard to work with?
- Tell me about a time when you worked as a member of a team.
- In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others?

5. They want to know if you want their job with their company.

- What are you looking for in a position?
- Who else are you interviewing with?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What do you know about the company?

Questions for You to Ask

***Prepare questions to ask the recruiter, such as:**

- What do you think are the three key skills/strengths vital to this position?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?
- Is there a lot of team project work?
- What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? in the first year?
- What are some of the department's ongoing and anticipated special projects?
- Identify a typical career path in your organization for someone with my qualifications.
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- What is the retention rate of individuals in the position for which I am interviewing?
- Tell me about your initial, as well as future training programs.
- What are the challenging facets of this job?
- What industry trends will occur in this company?
- Describe the work environment.
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe your company's personality and management style?
- Is it company policy to promote within?
- Tell me the work history of your top management.
- What are your expectations for new hires?
- What is the overall structure of the department where this position is located?
- What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
- What is the next step in the hiring process for this position?
- Do not ask about salary and benefits.

***Practice, Practice, Practice. You only get one chance.**

Illegal Questions

It is important to keep in mind that most employers only ask questions that they believe will help them choose the best person for the position regardless of race/color, sex/gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, national origin/citizenship. With that in mind, much of the time if an employer asks an illegal question they are not asking it for the reason it is illegal.

For instance if some asks: "Does your (boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife) have a problem with you working long hours since we work 45-50 hours a week?"

Their concern is can you work 45-50 hours a week. So they should have asked: "Is there any reason you would not be able to work 45-50 hours a week?"

If you are asked an illegal questions you have several options:

1. You can answer the question: "My (boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife) is very supportive of my career and has no problem with me working long hours" *This might lead to more illegal questions or might still be considered a "wrong" answer.*
2. You can refuse to answer the question: "I do not have to answer that since it is illegal." *Although it is well within your rights to do so this might seem confrontational or uncooperative.*
3. You could analyze the question for the true intent and respond to the intent rather than the actual question: "My career is my top priority and working 45-50 hours a week is not a problem at all"

Most questions that ask about military discharge, arrest record, disabilities, marital/family status, age, national origin/citizenship, race/ethnic background or any other non-job related attribute are illegal. But keep in mind that some are job related. For example: Many Department of Defense jobs require U.S. Citizenship.

Traditional Questions

38. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
39. Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
40. What do you know about our company?
41. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
42. Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size?
43. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
44. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
45. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
46. Are you willing to travel?
47. Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
48. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which the company is located?
49. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
50. What have you learned from your mistakes?
51. Tell me about yourself.
52. How would you describe yourself?
53. How would a close friend describe you?
54. Are you creative?
55. What do you consider to be your major strengths?
56. What do you consider to be your major weaknesses?
57. What is the most difficult work-related situation you have ever faced?
58. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
59. Can you give me an example of a time when you took the initiative at work?
60. Think of a crisis situation, during which things got out of control. Why did it happen, and what role did you play?
61. If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?
62. What was your most rewarding college experience?
63. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
64. What do you think determines an individual's progress within a company?
65. What relationship should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her?
66. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
67. What do you know about our company?
68. What extracurricular activities did you pursue?
69. Did you hold positions of leadership in any organizations?
70. How has your college experience prepared you for a professional career?
71. How would working evenings affect you?
72. How important is communication and interaction with others on the job?
73. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?

Behavioral Interviewing

Employers are increasingly using behavioral interviewing in the hiring process. This type of interview is based on the idea that the best way to predict your future performance is to examine your past and present performance. Behavioral interviewing also gives interviewers a chance to see how good you are at thinking and communicating “on your feet”. Prepare for Behavioral Interviews by researching what job competencies an employer might seek. Some examples of Job Competencies are below:

Adaptability	Equipment Operation	Personal Effectiveness
Analysis	Fact Finding-Oral	Persuasion
Analytical Problem Solving	Financial Analytical Ability	Participative Management
Assertiveness	Flexibility	Practical Learning
Attention to Detail	Futuristic Thinking	Presentation Skills
Communication-Oral	Goal Orientation	Process Operation
Communication-Written	Impact	Rapport Building
Conflict Management	Independence	Resilience
Continuous Learning	Initiative	Risk Taking
Control	Innovation	Safety Awareness
Creativity/Innovation	Integrity	Sales/Persuasiveness
Customer Service	Interpersonal Skills	Sensitivity
Decision Making	Judgment	Strategic Analysis
Decisiveness	Leadership	Stress
Delegation	Influence	Teamwork
Diplomacy	Listening	Professional Knowledge
Empathy	Management	Technical Proficiency
Employee Development	Motivation	Tenacity
Energy	Negotiation	Training
Entrepreneurial Insight	Planning and Organizing	Written Communication

When answering behavioral questions use the STAR Method and convey specific *situations, actions, and outcomes/results*.

S ituation	Use specific details about a situation or task.
T ask	Tell what led to the situation or task?
A ction Taken	Discuss what you did and who was involved?
R esult or outcome	Communicate the outcome?

Behavioral Interviewing

Employers will follow up their main question with **probing questions** which are designed to elicit specific details that help them assess you in light of the job's success factors. Probing questions may involve asking you to reflect on your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and attitudes and may also seek to uncover the kinds of dialogue you engaged in and the specific outcome of a given situation. Some examples of probing questions include:

What were you thinking when that happened?

What kind of mental processing do you utilize to evaluate a given situation?

What was your reaction?

How are you prone to respond in a given set of circumstances?

What did you actually do?

Can you organize and implement a strategy?

What did you actually say?

Do you communicate effectively in a variety of settings?

What did other people/the other person say in response?

How well do you handle praise and criticism?

How did it finally turn out?

Do you see things through to completion?

What was the final result?

Are you success-oriented?

What did you learn about yourself as a result of this situation?

Are you motivated toward self-evaluation and self-improvement?

What did you learn about others as a result of this situation?

Did this experience give you some perspective about how you deal with people?

What, if anything, would you do differently given the same situation?

Did this experience give you some perspective about how you deal with people?

Is there anything else I should know about this situation?

What makes you unique from the last person who answered the same question?

Traditional Questions

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 ten 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 are the most important rewards you expect in your business career?
8. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
9. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
10. Which is more important to you: the money or the type of job?
11. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
12. How would you describe yourself?
13. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you would describe you?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
15. How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
16. Why should I hire you?
17. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in business?
18. How do you determine or evaluate success?
19. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
20. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
21. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
22. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
23. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
24. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
25. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
26. Why did you select your college or university?
27. What led you to choose your field of major study?
28. What college subjects did you like best? Why?
29. What college subjects did you like least? Why?
30. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study different? Why?
31. What changes would you make in your college or university?
32. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
33. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
34. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activity?
35. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
36. How do you work under pressure?
37. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?

Types of Interviews

TELEPHONE

Be ready for a telephone interview from the moment you apply for a position. Many times a company will ask you questions the first time they contact you to begin assessing your qualifications. Keep a list with you of the positions you have applied for, the company it is with, the job description and any other pertinent information. The fact that they cannot see you is a challenge but also a benefit, **use your notes**.

GROUP

Some employers will interview several candidates at the same time or you might find yourself in a social setting with the other candidates during the interview process. Keep in mind that the employer is **always evaluating you**. You want to be seen as a team player.

PANEL

A panel is the reverse of the group interview. There are several people from the employer. You might be interviewed by 2-10 people at the same time. Be sure to make eye contact with each person. When a question is asked you want to direct 50% of your eye contact to the person that asked the question and the other 50% to the other members of the panel. Try to get everyone's contact information so that you can write each of them a thank you letter.

ONE-ON-ONE

This is the traditional format for interviews. Make good eye contact and try to match their "style". If they are very conservative and don't smile it would not be a good idea to try humor in the interview.

ON-CAMPUS

Interviewing on-campus is a huge benefit for UNT students and alumni! The main challenge is that you usually only have **30 minutes with the recruiter**. So be sure to use all the time to your advantage. If there are company representatives in the waiting area, take advantage of the extra "face time" by speaking with them. Remember, they are always evaluating you.

ON-SITE

When you get an interview that is at the employer's place of business you need to stay on your toes. **You want to be nice to everyone** from the receptionist to people you pass by in the parking lot. You never know what their position is at the company. Plan your route to the location and make sure you allow for traffic. You **do not** want to be late to an interview! Arrive about 15 minutes early but you want to be near the employer about 1 hr before your interview so you can make sure you have everything together. Take the last 45 minutes to get some water or a bite to eat if you are hungry.

Behavioral Questions

Examples of Behavioral Questions related to Job Competencies:

ADAPTABILITY

Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.

ANALYTICAL SKILLS / PROBLEM SOLVING

Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What did you do? What was your thought process? What was the outcome? What do you wish you had done differently?

COMMUNICATION

Give me 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). How did you handle the situation? What obstacles or difficulties did you face? How did you deal with them?

CREATIVITY

Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way. What was the outcome? Were you happy or satisfied with it?

DECISION MAKING

Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Why? Were you happy with the outcome?

FLEXIBILITY

Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker understand a task. How did you assist them? What was the result?

GOAL SETTING

Tell me about a goal that you set that you did not reach. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?

INITIATIVE

What was the best idea you came up with during your professional or college career? How did you apply it?

INTEGRITY/HONESTY

Give an example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree. Why?

LEADERSHIP

Tell me about a team project when you had to take the lead or take charge of the project? What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result?

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it? How did the relationship progress?

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION / TIME MANAGEMENT

How do you prioritize projects and tasks when scheduling your time? Give me some examples.

TEAMWORK

Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?

Hypothetical and Stress Interviews

HYPOTHETICAL INTERVIEWS

Employers will sometimes “put” you in a work situation to test your problem solving skills. You must be able to think on your feet and analyze the situation while keeping in mind the company's culture and values.

Don't concentrate so much on what your final answer is but that you show a logical thought process in developing your answer. There is sometimes no “one” right answer but there are definitely wrong ones.

Steps to problem solving:

1. Gather relative information
2. Evaluate your information
3. Prioritize the information
4. Propose and weigh possible solutions
5. Choose and propose your solution
6. Discuss how you would evaluate the effectiveness of your solution

Examples:

- How would you handle it if a co-worker confided in you that they have seen another employee stealing from the company?
- What would you do if 2 out of 3 people did not show up for their shift?
- What would you do if your supervisor asked you to do something that you felt was unethical? Do you feel it is unethical to charge two different prices for the same service?

STRESS INTERVIEWS

If you feel that you are being interrogated rather than interviewed you might be in a “stress or direct interview.” The employer may be interested to see how you handle pressure. They will ask direct questions that will put you on the spot. The trick is to stay calm and composed while addressing their concern or answering the question

Examples:

- The recruiter makes you wait 10 minutes.
- Why is your GPA not higher?
- I don't know if you have what it takes for this position. *(Then silence)*

Critical Thinking Interviews

If you are interviewing with a consulting company you have a high probability of running into a Critical Thinking or Case Interview Question. These might sound ridiculous but they are gaining clout with big business. This type of interview requires much more of a two way communication between the candidate and the interviewer.

They are not necessarily looking for the “right” answer but rather they want to see common sense, creativity and problem solving skills.

Question:

How many jellybeans will fit in a 747?

Possible answer:

Does the plane have seats in it? As that would affect how many I could fit in. Also when do I need this information and what will we use it for? What size jellybean? Can I grind them up or melt them to get more in? Do we want to get more in? Does it have to take off and land? Can I fill up the fuel tanks? Etc...

Question:

Why is a man-hole cover round?

Possible Answer:

Because it is covering a round hole and that is the most effective use of materials. Also because a round cover cannot fall into the round hole it is covering.

Or they might ask you about a current case they are working on. You want to use the same problem solving skills as you would in a Hypothetical Interview:

Steps to problem solving:

1. Gather relative information
2. Evaluate your information
3. Prioritize the information
4. Propose and weigh possible solutions
5. Choose and propose your solution
6. Discuss how you would evaluate the effectiveness of your solution