

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

KEY CONCEPT: Focus on the EMPLOYER'S needs.

As a job seeker, you naturally focus your energies on defining the qualities that you want in a job and an employer.

But in an interview situation, the employer is more interested in knowing what **you can do for their organization** and how you can fill the role they have available. Especially in a strong job market, it is all too easy for inexperienced job seekers to focus on their own needs and desires, while failing to address, in concrete terms, how they can meet the employer's needs.

At the same time, however, the employer wants to determine whether you are sufficiently motivated to excel in this job. While you should focus on the contribution you can make to the organization, you should also convey your interest in the job, the career field and the organization by asking well-thought-out questions and by clearly defining and articulating your career goals.

To get a handle on how you have performed in previous roles, recruiters will often ask "behavioral interview questions", which ask you to relate a specific experience based on the criteria set by the interviewer. (An example would be, "Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.")

To successfully answer behavioural interview questions (as well as most other interview questions), you must be prepared to speak in concise terms about relevant experiences that reflect positively on your skills and your character.

a) Check our lists of interview questions, then make your own list of the questions you anticipate hearing:

1. [commonly asked questions in a traditional interview](#)
2. [commonly asked questions in a behavioural interview/Competency based interviews](#)

b) **Practice** answering potential questions. There are two ways to do this:

1. **Write** out your responses to the most likely questions. This will help you to focus on creating concise answers.
2. **Practice** answering these questions out loud. Don't memorize answers (you don't want to come off as wooden or pre-packaged in your interview), but do rehearse. You will feel much more articulate and be more focused if you've actually spoken your answers to anticipated questions.

TIP: Ask a friend or adult family member to read the questions to you - you may feel a little silly, at first, but you'd be amazed at how this will force you to shape your answers and be concise.

GENERATE A LIST OF QUESTIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE EMPLOYER.

There are three reasons to ask intelligent and informed questions in an interview:

- a) You demonstrate your interest in the job and the company.
- b) You demonstrate that you have researched the company to the extent that you can now ask more detailed and probing questions.
- c) You need to gather information about this job and this employer to see if they really do match your career goals and needs.

FIVE EMPLOYER CONCERNS

In preparing for your interviews, you may feel overwhelmed by the variety of questions that you must anticipate.

But your interview preparation will be less stressful and better organized if you realize that **all interview questions are designed to address five key employer concerns.**

SKILLS CONCERNS

1. Can you do the job?

- Do you currently possess the skills to do the job at hand and become a productive employee within a reasonable amount of time?
- Have you demonstrated that you can do this job elsewhere? (This is always the best evidence that you possess the required skills.) How successful were you at this job? What types of problems did you encounter? And did these problems draw out your problem-solving abilities and push you to develop new skills, or are they likely to be problems on this job, too?
- If you have not done this job elsewhere, can you provide evidence that you have the necessary skills to succeed at this job?

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS CONCERNS

2. Are you motivated to do the job well?

- Are you interested in and excited by this type of work? Do you have the energy and self-confidence to do the job? What evidence can you provide to support this?
- Will you be hardworking and conscientious - or will you be absent or frequently late, miss assignments, be distracted or otherwise mess up?
- Will you stay long enough to make a contribution after the expense and time that the company invests in recruiting and training you?

3. Will you get along well with others?

- Will you fit in with the "culture" of this organization - the values, attitudes and personal style of this particular workplace?
- Will you be a team player, and what evidence can you provide to support this?

- Will you be a positive influence on your co-workers - an enthusiastic non-complainer, willing to take on extra tasks when needed - or will you hold grudges, breed dissension and talk down your managers and the company?

4. **Are you manageable?**

- Do you take directions easily? Do you communicate openly and tactfully? Will you be easy to manage, or will you try to circumvent or undermine your manager's authority? What evidence supports this?
- Will you fit in with the existing management style? Will you support organizational policies and procedures?

MONEY CONCERNS

5. **Can the company afford you?**

- Is the salary range for this job compatible with your salary history?
- Does the benefits package meet your needs and expectations?

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING

Have you noticed that only one of the five employer concerns is about your skills? The key to successful interviewing is that the person with the best skills or most relevant experience is not necessarily the one who gets the job. If you are not the candidate with the best skill set, you may still get the nod if you are enthusiastic and very well-prepared, and if you can demonstrate that you are motivated, manageable and a team player who fits in with the organization's culture.

Conversely, if you are the candidate with the best skills, you can still lose the job if you don't demonstrate that you are also the best person for the job.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself (in two minutes).

A common opener, this broad question can "throw" many interviewees. It is in fact a "sell-me" invitation. Develop a brief summation of your background leading into your interest and desire to work for the organization as well as your qualifications for the position.

2. Why do you feel that you will be successful in?
3. Why did you decide to interview with our organization?
4. Are you willing to relocate?
5. Why did you choose accounting as a career?
6. Tell me about your scholastic record.
7. What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
8. Tell me about your extra-curricular activities and interests.
9. What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing school or work experiences?
10. What did you learn from your part-time or holiday job experiences?
11. What supervisory or leadership roles have you held?
12. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Everyone has a weakness but remember not to answer in a negative way. Turn your weakness into a positive (for example) "Because I tend to procrastinate, I have learned to work well under pressure and to always get work done on time."

13. Do you have plans for post-graduate studies?
14. How do you spend your spare time?
15. Why should we hire you?

From your research, you should have gathered information on entry level opportunities within the organization and the necessary qualifications for those positions. From your own self-analysis you will have gained insight into your strengths and accomplishments. Mention key functions of the job and discuss your skills in relation to these functions. Use experiences from previous jobs, internships, and activities as examples to support your answer.

16. Describe briefly your philosophy of finance.
17. How would your last supervisor describe you?

18. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

This question is popular because it gathers a lot of useful information: maturity, foresight and realistic outlook, degree of preparation in career planning, and commitment to the organization and profession. -- In your research determine what position you could reasonably reach in five years. Speak to others who have successfully advanced themselves in the organization or profession. Express your desire and capability to grow within the organization. While you may be unsure of your future plans, demonstrate your knowledge of potential career paths.

21. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievements?

22. How do you work under pressure?

23. Why do you want to leave your current job? (If employed full-time.)

24. Describe one or two achievements which have given you the most satisfaction.

25. In what ways would you contribute to our organization?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

A Few Key Principles about Asking Questions:

1. Ask only those questions to which you want an answer. This may seem obvious, but many people will ask questions merely to impress the interviewer. Why waste your time and theirs when they are likely to see through your smoke-screen?
2. Ask questions that reveal the depth of your research and your interest in the job. In other words, don't ask questions that are easily answered on the company Web site or in the job description. (You do have a copy of the job description, don't you?)
3. Don't ask questions about salary, vacation, or other benefits until you are offered the job.

Some Sample Questions:

1. How and when will my performance be evaluated on this job? How is success measured in this department / organization?
2. I read in your literature that your training program is comprised of three six-month rotations. Does the employee have any input into where he will go at the end of each rotation? How do you evaluate the employee's performance during the training period?
3. I read in Business Week that a major competitor of yours is increasing its market share in your main market. What plans does your firm have to regain its lost market share?
4. Can you please tell me how your career has developed at this organization? Would someone entering the firm today have similar opportunities?
5. What will my typical day be like?
6. What is an average week in this job really like?
7. What are the challenging facets of the job?
8. What is the number one priority of the person who accepts this job?

9. What do you consider the five most important day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
10. What are some examples of the best results produced by people in this position?
11. Does the management encourage the policy of promotion from within the organization?
12. What are the organization's plans for future growth or change?
13. What makes your organisation different?
14. What are the organization's strengths, and what challenges does it face?
15. How would you describe your organization's personality and management style?
16. What do your company's managers and supervisors have in common?
17. What are your expectations for new hires within their first three to six months on the job? The first year?
18. What might I expect to be doing over the next three to five years?
19. Describe the work environment.
20. What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
21. What do you see as the strengths of the department?
22. What does the department hope to achieve in the next two to three years?
23. How will that help the organization?
24. What is the biggest single problem facing the organization now?
25. What could be done if an employee doesn't feel challenged or satisfied?
26. Are lateral or rotational job moves available to provide broader experience?
27. Are they considered valuable?
28. How are employees able to stay current on changes and trends in their field?
29. What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
30. What happened to the last person who had this job?
31. Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?
32. How many people have held this position in the last two years?
33. Who would be my supervisor? To whom would I report?
34. Whom will I supervise?
35. With whom will I be working most closely?
36. What characteristics does a successful person have in your organization?
37. How often are performance reviews given and how are they conducted?
38. What are the company's values? What does the company stand for?
39. How are the company's values reflected in everyday activities?
40. What's the best thing about working here? the worst thing?
41. What is unique about the way this company operates?
42. Why did you come to work here?
43. What keeps you here?
44. What skills have helped you the most?
45. **Education** candidates may wish to ask about in-service training and opportunities for professional development.

QUESTIONS NOT TO ASK

Want to know what not to ask a potential employer? Here's "The Rogue's Gallery of 16 Awful Questions," adapted from Richard Fein's **101 Dynamite Questions to Ask at Your Job Interview**.

1. What does your company do?
2. What are your psychiatric benefits?
3. Are you (the interviewer) married?
4. Can you guarantee me that I will still have a job a year from now?
5. The job description mentions weekend work. Would I really have to do that?
6. How can you determine my qualifications in a short interview?
7. Do I get to keep the frequent flyer miles from my trips?
8. Would anyone notice if I came in late and left early?
9. How am I as a candidate?
10. What is the zodiac sign of your company's president?
11. How many (particular ethnic group) do you have working here?
12. Do you offer free parking?
13. What does this company consider a good absenteeism record?
14. What do you mean by "relocate"?
15. Do you reimburse the cost of getting an MBA?
16. Can you tell me about your retirement plan?

COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWS/ BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As competency-based interviews are becoming an ever more frequent part of candidate selection, here is a brief guide to what such interviews involve, along with some advice on how best to approach them.

INTRODUCTION

Competency-based behavioural interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Accordingly, the interviewer's goal is to obtain specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours. Interview questions are carefully designed to probe specific skills, competencies and characteristics which are relevant to job success for the position in question. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate candidates.

The word competency / behavioural is widely used in business and personnel psychology and refers to the behaviours that are necessary to achieve organisational goals. A competency is also something you can measure and lists of competencies form a common language for describing how people perform in different situations. Every job can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that competencies can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and, of course, selection.

Whilst each interview may vary in terms of the questions asked / competencies behaviour reviewed, there are general themes that are usually covered. It is well worth preparing for

this type of interview by, for example, being familiar with some of the possible questions and how you would answer them.

TYPES OF COMPETENCIES LIKELY TO BE ASSESSED

Individual competencies - your personal attributes: flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity

Managerial competencies - taking charge of other people: leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control

Analytical competencies - the elements of decision making: innovation, analytical skills, numerical problem solving, problem solving, practical learning, detail consciousness

Interpersonal competencies - dealing with other people: communication, impact, persuasiveness, personal awareness, teamwork, openness

Motivational competencies - the things that drive you: resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, focus on quality

EXAMPLES OF COMPETENCY BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

PROBLEM SOLVING AND JUDGMENT

1. Tell me about a time when you had to identify the underlying causes to a problem.
2. Describe a time when you had to analyse a problem and generate a solution.
3. Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a problem or make a decision that required careful thought. What did you do?

SELF-MANAGEMENT, SELF-MOTIVATION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Do you always strive to achieve a standard of excellence, use initiative at the appropriate time and show persistence in pursuing goals? Accurate self-assessment skills will allow you to be objective and critical in evaluating your strengths and weaknesses.

1. Tell me about a time when you acted over and above the expectations of your role.
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. How do you think a close friend who knows you well would describe you?

ABILITY, COMPETENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

Designed to discover what inspires you and motivates you to achieve and whether you are a loner or a team person.

1. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
2. Describe a time when you led or motivated others.
3. What do you feel qualifies you for this position?
4. Tell me about a time when you recognised a problem in your organisation, what did you do?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ETHICS

How do you behave in a crisis? What does it take to shake your poise or self-confidence? What approach do you take to problem solving?

1. Tell me about a significant crisis you have faced.
2. Tell me about a difficult customer or a customer complaint that you have dealt with.
3. How do you resolve conflict in the groups or teams that you are a part of?

PERSONAL AND CAREER OBJECTIVES

Employers are likely to invest money in your training and development and will want to ensure that your objectives don't conflict with theirs.

1. What are your short and long-term goals?
2. When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
3. What are the most important things you are seeking in a career?

ADAPTABILITY

How quickly and how positively will you adapt to changes in work practices, work roles and work environments and the general flux of the modern workplace? How do you manage or avoid stress?

1. Tell me about a time when you changed your priorities to meet others' expectations.
2. Describe a time when you altered your own behaviour to fit the situation.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities.

ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

These are generally checking that you have effective work habits, and the knowledge of workplace routines and some experience of common office administration systems.

1. Tell me how you organise your work and schedule your time.
2. Tell me about computer software packages you are familiar with and your experience in using them.
3. Tell me about your experience of managing a budget.

PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

What's your problem-solving style? Do you manage your activities to minimise or avoid them? How do you behave in a crisis?

1. Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
2. What significant problems have you faced in the last year?
3. How do you work under pressure?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the circumstances and what did you do?

COMMUNICATION

Are you an active listener, do you really listen and do you hear what is actually said. Are you able to read the non-verbal messages that others communicate? Do you communicate in an engaging and convincing way?

1. Describe a situation you were involved in that required a multidimensional communication strategy.
2. Give an example of a difficult or sensitive situation that required extensive communication?
3. Tell me about a time when you really had to pay attention to what someone else was saying, actively seeking to understand their message.

ORGANISATIONAL AWARENESS

1. Describe the culture of your organisation and give an example of how you work within this culture to achieve a goal.

2. Describe the things you consider and the steps you take in assessing the viability of a new idea or initiative.
3. Tell me about a time when you used your knowledge of the organisation to get what you needed.

CLIENT FOCUS

1. Give an example of how you provided service to a client/stakeholder beyond their expectations. How did you identify the need? How did you respond?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a client/stakeholder service issue.
3. Describe a situation in which you acted as an advocate within your organization for stakeholders' needs where there was some organizational resistance to be overcome.

TEAMWORK

Employers need people who are socially competent. The desire to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical. Many workplaces function on the basis of project teams.

1. Tell me about a time when you worked successfully as a member of a team.
2. Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively.
3. Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team, and a conflict arose within the team. What did you do?

RESULTS ORIENTATION

1. Tell me about a time when you set and achieved a goal.
2. Tell me about a time when you improved the way things were typically done on the job.
3. Describe something you have done to improve the performance of your work unit.

INFLUENCING OR PERSUADING OTHERS

You may have strong verbal skills but can you influence another person to change their thinking or take some action – perhaps a colleague follows your advice or a client decides to buy a service or product. At management level have you the skills to persuade and involve rather than coerce and punish? Are you ethical in your dealings with people?

1. Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly.
2. Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with.
3. Tell me about a person or event that has been influential in your personal development.

PREPARING FOR COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWS

To prepare for competency-based interviews, first review the job description carefully and identify the skills and traits likely to be assessed. Next, identify the situations and experiences that you will refer to in the interview to demonstrate these skills and traits. Competency-focused, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will impress the interviewer.

The **STAR** model will provide a structure to your answers:

Situation - describe a situation or problem that you have encountered

Task - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem

Action - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome

Results - highlight outcomes achieved

EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION

Can you give us an example of when you have dealt with a difficult situation on your team? What was the situation? Why had it happened? What did you do? How was the situation resolved?

Describe the **Situation** and the **Task** briefly. Most of your answers should focus on **Action** and **Results**; applying the who (you), what, when, where, why and how model often used in journalism to answer all the relevant questions that will keep you focused and make your description more interesting.

POSSIBLE GOOD ANSWER

I was working on an audit with a more junior team member who had a reputation for not pulling his weight. I was finding it difficult to get the most out of him and found myself thinking back to what my colleagues had said about this person. I decided to speak to him in private and give him some feedback on what the general opinion in the team was. I did this in a diplomatic way, asking him if he needed more guidance or if he was having trouble at all. He opened up to me saying that he was not aware of how he was seen by the team and that he sometimes did not understand what he was meant to be doing and that the more senior team members had taken over the assignments without involving or coaching him. He found it quite hard to speak up. I took this on board and dedicated extra time to assisting him with our assignment as well as giving him more (guided) responsibility. I spoke to my senior colleagues and asked them to be aware of more junior staff concerns. His work improved and he felt much happier within the team.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY FOR INTERVIEWS

What do I wear to the interview? It's a question millions of people agonize over on some level while looking for a job.

The bad news is that there are few cut-and-dried answers. As the saying goes, there's no accounting for taste, and each interviewer has his unique sense of what's appropriate interview attire. The good news? Deciding what to wear isn't as difficult as you might think.

DRESS ONE OR TWO LEVELS UP

"The rule of thumb is that you dress one or two levels higher than the job that you're going for," "If you were going for a job as a mechanic, you wouldn't go in there in dirty overalls, even though that's how you would dress for that kind of work. You would still go in there and show respect. You would go in with an open-collar shirt, clean pants and maybe a jacket."

By dressing a notch or two above what's standard apparel for the position you're interviewing for, "you're definitely showing that you care about this job, and that you know the game."

CAUTION IS THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

When it's time to get dressed for the interview, remember: It's not so much that you're trying to get the job with what you wear, it's more a matter of not taking yourself out of contention with your presentation. "Interviewers can decide in 10 seconds that they don't want you," "It will take them longer to decide they do want you." Chances are good that by dressing on the conservative side, you won't unintentionally disqualify yourself. But trying to demonstrate how hip you are with your exposed lower back tattoos or laid-back outfit could backfire.

THIS ISN'T 1999

Once upon a time during the dotcom heyday, "people would come in with nose rings and sandals, and because there really was a severe labour shortage, they'd get hired."

Young, freshly minted grads often make the mistake these days of going too casual, perhaps confusing what once was with what now is. These days, people are not desperate for you. Recent grads tend to dress like they're students at interviews. Nobody forgives that. Not in this market.

USE YOUR JUDGMENT

Is a suit always a must in an interview? Absolutely not. If you were looking for a position in mid winter instead of wearing a suit you could wear slacks and a sweater.

It's never fine to go in with a collarless shirt. And for men, we suggests putting on a jacket, even when not wearing a tie.

BEING TOO TRUE TO YOURSELF

There are those who say it's pointless to dress for an interview in a way that you wouldn't once you're on the job. Why misrepresent yourself to a future employer or try to be someone you're not?

"If you want to have eight earrings and have your tongue pierced, that's fine." "But you're showing you don't know how to play the game. If it's so important to you, go ahead and dress like you normally do, but realize that you may not get the job."

SHOES

All too often candidates go on interviews with scuffed shoes. For ladies it is common to see the tips of you shoes bumped. For men your shoes have not been polished and are in desperate need of replacement. More than any other single dress factor shoes have lost hundred of candidates a desirable job.

DEALING WITH INTERVIEW ANXIETY

1. Treat your interview like a final exam. If you prepare well, the test will be easy.

Research the Company and the career field well. Ask questions that reveal the depth of your research. Write out answers to possible questions.
2. Practice makes progress. The more you interview (including practice interviews), the more comfortable and polished you will become.
3. Remember that everybody experiences some level of interview jitters. You are not alone.
4. And keep in mind that the interviewer does not hold all the cards and that you are evaluating the job and the company, as well. You will not truly know if you want the job, or if you want to work for a particular organization, until you have had at least one interview and have had a chance to evaluate the pluses and minuses of this opportunity. Remember that the interview is an opportunity for you to ask questions and to find out if the "fit" is right for your skills and interests, your personality and your long-term goals.

A STORY TO EASE YOUR INTERVIEW ANGST

At a national conference on career counseling, one of the presenters gave a demonstration that is indelibly etched in our memories.

He called his assistant to the front of the room to participate in an interview role play. The presenter, playing the part of the interviewer, greeted his assistant by saying, "Welcome, have a seat." Seeking only the interviewee's name, he continued, "Okay, now, you are . . . ?" His assistant, in the role of the interviewee, stumbled - "Umm, uhh, I'm ... umm."

The presenter leaped up from his seat and, feigning ridicule, shouted, "You can't even remember your own name?! What a loser!" He then reached into his jacket pocket, produced a can of Silly String and showered his assistant with the sticky substance. "What a joke! Get outta my office!"

The presenter then politely thanked his assistant and, turning to his rather shocked and amused audience, asked, "Isn't that just about the worst thing that can happen in an interview? Now, obviously, that would never happen in a real interview. But what is the worst thing that is likely to happen?"

Our responses included "being embarrassed," "being so nervous you couldn't get your thoughts across," "the interviewer reads the newspaper while you answer questions" and "losing a job that you know you are qualified for." The presenter then asked, "Okay, so what are the consequences of those events?" And the worst consequences that anybody could come up with were loss of self-esteem and not being offered the job.

The presenter then turned the tables. "What can happen to a company if a poor hiring decision is made?" he asked. The responses were much more dramatic. A really poor employee could ruin productivity, sexually harass other employees, cause accidents, make life miserable for managers, cause other employees to leave, give away company secrets to competitors, steal from the company, sue the company - in essence, create havoc and harm the company's bottom line, in some cases severely.

So here's the point of the story - if you have gotten as far as an interview, the company already believes that you probably have the skills to succeed in the job. Though they will probe for strengths and weaknesses, more often than not they want you to succeed in the interview, and they're giving you the opportunity to demonstrate that you will be an able, conscientious and motivated employee. While the company has much to lose by making a poor decision, you have everything to gain and almost nothing to lose during the interview process.

REMEMBER:

1. Solid preparation for each interview will ease some of your jitters.
2. While you must focus your attention on what you have to offer the company, you are meanwhile evaluating the company to determine the right "fit" with your skills, your personality and your short- and long-term goals. You do hold some of the power in this process.

RESEARCH BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

"Never, ever walk into an interview not knowing the company, its products, its problems, its opportunities and its competitors. Again, the answers are out there.

Dig up enough facts to help you talk intelligently to your potential employer. **Failure to do so will mark you as a half-hearted candidate ... and you will lose out to other, better-prepared job seekers. Every time."**

WHY DO RESEARCH BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW?

1. You will be able to more fully demonstrate your enthusiasm for the career field and the organization.
2. You will also be able to articulate how your skills, knowledge and values match those of the organization and industry.
3. You can determine if this is an organization to which you would want to devote the next few years of your work life.

REMEMBER: You can never know "too much" about an organization. Interviewers are always impressed when you have conducted your research thoroughly and can ask informed, intelligent questions about the organization and the job.

RESEARCH THE CAREER FIELD

Before an Interview, you **MUST** Educate Yourself:

1. How does this industry work - what do the organizations do, how do they make their money (or, in the case of nonprofits and government agencies, how and whom do they serve)?
2. What are the skills and personal qualities that successful professionals in this industry share?
3. What are the significant trends in this industry?

Keep up with industry trends - read relevant "trade journals" and websites.

RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

When you go for an interview, you should absolutely know: the company, its products, its problems, its opportunities and its competitors.

AS YOU RESEARCH, KEEP THIS QUESTION IN MIND:

What are the skills and personality characteristics that this job demands and this organization values, and how does your experience and background demonstrates those skills and traits?

BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW, YOU SHOULD KNOW THE FOLLOWING (BARE MINIMUM):

1. What are this organization's products and/or services? (Even non-profit organizations serve people through education, lobbying efforts, publications, etc.)
2. What direction has the organization taken within the past one to two years, and what might be expected in the near future?
3. What does this organization value? Obviously, for-profit organizations value profit. But most organizations are driven by other values, as well - social conformity; innovation; teamwork; efficiency; the professional development of its employees; public service. You should search for: a) what the organization states about its values, and b) what they really are. The two are not always in agreement.
4. If you will be working in a division of the organization, what is the role of that division, and how does it relate to the parent organization?
5. **IF YOU**
 - i. are seeking a job above entry-level,
 - ii. **OR** have made it past the first-round interview and have been asked back for another interview,

- iii. OR just want to be very well-prepared for your first-round interview, then you should look for the following information about the employer:

A. Nature/Structure of the Organization

- What products and services are offered?
- Who are their customers?
- What are the different branches or divisions of the company?

B. Place within the industry, in comparison with other companies.

- Reputation. Do they serve their customers well? What is the quality of their products/services?
- Market niche. Do they cover many industries? One industry broadly? One little spot within an industry?

C. Corporate culture/work environment.

These questions are often best answered through speaking with current employees.

- What does the company value? Is it teamwork? Uniformity? Being an leader within the industry? Youth? Longevity? Commitment to a certain social ideal?
- What is the workplace like? Is there a dress code? Are people promoted from within? Is innovation encouraged? Are there opportunities for professional development and learning on-the-job?

D. Financial stability and health.

- How old is the company?
- Have they been profitable over the past few years?
- Have they been hiring new employees recently? Laying people off?

E. Future expectations.

- Are they planning new products/services?
- Are they planning on any expansion?

6. Specific Career Fields:

DURING THE INTERVIEW

BE ENTHUSIASTIC, BUT BE SINCERE

Enthusiasm is vital! Demonstrate your interest in the job and in the company. Enthusiasm works best when it is:

- **Sincere** - don't gush over a job or a company that you couldn't give a hoot about. In fact, why are you interviewing with this company if you're not excited about the job?
- **Based in your deep interests** - if you start your career and job search with an awareness of your deepest, most compelling interests, then you should eventually find yourself in interviews for jobs that you truly are excited about.

LISTEN CAREFULLY TO THE INTERVIEWER

If you don't listen well during the interview, you are telling the interviewer that you may not listen well to your coworkers and managers.

- Don't be afraid of silence during the interview - it's better to think about a question for a few moments, rather than jumping in with an answer that's off-target or long and rambling.
- If the question seems ambiguous or you need more clarification, ask the interviewer to elaborate or restate the question. (But don't use this as a ruse to gain more time.)
- Don't display defensiveness when a tough question has you stumped.

THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN SET YOURSELF APART FROM OTHER APPLICANTS

Your interviewer may be bored to tears from interviewing a series of cookie-cutter candidates who speak in the same generalities about their qualifications: "I'm a diligent worker, I'm a team player, I'm a quick learner."

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't use those terms in describing yourself. But you should be able to describe, in detail, previous situations in which you **demonstrated** those qualities.

KEEP THE INTERVIEWER'S ATTENTION

You can apply the same principles that work in public speaking - vary the tone and tempo of your voice; take your nervous energy and translate that into enthusiasm; maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Where appropriate, ask questions that will provide information about the job and the interviewer.

Try to match the interviewer's energy level. People like to hire others that are like themselves.

If an interviewer is fairly abrupt and to the point maintain this tempo if you give long winded lengthy stories the interviewer will feel he has very little in common with you. He may find himself irritated by your long winded answer.

DON'T PLACE BLAME ON OR BE NEGATIVE ABOUT PAST EMPLOYERS

Badmouthing a previous employer or supervisor is the quickest way to lose a job offer. If you have experienced a bad employer or an inept manager, find the positives in your relationship and focus on those. If there were no positives, and you must talk about the job, focus as much as possible on your successes in that job and not on the conflicts.

DETAILS:

1. Plan on arriving at least fifteen minutes before the interview. That will help reduce your stress level, and you will ensure that traffic or other delays don't make you late.
2. Bring a pen and notebook with you. This needs to be a decent looking folder, you cannot arrive at an interview with a bashed about notebook. If you wish to take a few notes during your interview (to jot down your interviewer's responses to your questions, for example), ask the interviewer if that's okay.
3. Greet your interviewer by name, with a firm handshake and a smile. Until your interviewer tells you otherwise, use the more formal "Mr. (Smith)" or "Ms. (Johnson)."
4. Wait for the interviewer to sit down or invite you to sit down before seating yourself.
5. Do not smoke or chew gum or walk in with your sunglasses balanced on your head.
6. Sit comfortably, maintain good body posture.
7. Maintain good eye contact.
8. Listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying. Take a few seconds to think about a difficult question before responding. Responding quickly may convey that you're impulsive and don't take time to think about your decisions.
9. Don't make up answers to questions you don't know. Your interviewer will conclude that you will do the same thing in the work place.
10. Enthusiasm is vital! Demonstrate your interest in the job and in the company.