

The purpose of an interview is two-fold: to market your skills and relevant experience to the interviewer and to evaluate the organization's appropriateness for you. You accomplish this by showing the interviewer that you have the ability, communication skills, personality, growth potential, maturity, and intelligence to do a good job for that organization.

For many, the interview causes some degree of nervousness. This is normal; however, excessive nervousness may work against you. Others approach interviews with little enthusiasm and virtually no preparation. A laissez-faire attitude can be just as detrimental as excessive panic.

You should not schedule interviews with organizations “just for practice.”

EXPERIENCE + PREPARATION + PERFORMANCE = SUCCESS

Preparation

- ❖ Research the position, organization and the industry. Learn about the history, products and/or services, growth, future prospects, and any recent press the organization or industry has received. This research enables you to ask intelligent questions during the interview.
- ❖ Whenever possible, speak to people in the industry prior to the interview. If possible, talk to someone who works for the organization you are interviewing with. Try to get a feel for the culture of the organization, and any current trends in the industry.
- ❖ Prepare answers to commonly asked questions in advance. Review the list at the end of this guide. Remember, you may have only about 20 minutes to convince the interviewer that you are the best candidate.
- ❖ Decide on your attire well in advance of the interview. When in doubt, be conservative. Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly, if at all.
- ❖ When scheduling, write down the full name of the organization and the exact time, place and length of the interview.
- ❖ Check the interviewer's name beforehand. If you need to clarify pronunciation, call the organization.
- ❖ Bring along extra copies of your resume, and a pen and paper to jot down notes after the interview.
- ❖ Plan to arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled time of the interview to give you enough time to freshen up and relax!

Performance

- ❖ Greet the interviewer by name. Make eye contact and offer a firm handshake.
- ❖ Take your cues from the interviewer. Wait for him/her to offer you a chair.
- ❖ Don't let your anxiousness be apparent through distracting mannerisms. Refrain from biting your nails, drumming your fingers, etc. Be aware of your posture. Make eye contact frequently but do not stare. Never chew gum during or smoke prior to the interview.
- ❖ Be brief but articulate in your responses. Do not simply answer "yes" or "no", give concrete examples of your skills/experiences. For example, after identifying leadership as one of your skills, cite your role as team captain or student advisor to demonstrate that skill in action. Tell stories that emphasize your accomplishments.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to pause and consider a question before answering. If you start talking before you have considered what you are going to say, you may end up talking in circles.
- ❖ Display your enthusiasm for the company and the position. A monotone voice and lackluster approach will make you seem disinterested.
- ❖ Never speak negatively about former employers, professors, or colleagues during the interview. This may reflect badly on you and your ability to work with others.
- ❖ If you are asked a politically controversial question, make a judgment as to an appropriate response for you and state that briefly. Do not go into great detail.
- ❖ Do not initiate a discussion about salary, vacation, or other benefits. Ascertain the salary range for the position during your preliminary research. Avoid discussing specifics until a firm offer is extended, otherwise you may decrease your chances for negotiation.
- ❖ Interviewers rarely extend an offer at the initial interview; however, if you happen to find yourself in that position don't accept it on the spot. Thank the interviewer for the offer and ask for the offer in writing. Then ask if you may inform her/him of your decision by a specified date.
- ❖ At the close of the interview, thank the interviewer and clarify the next step. Ask when you should be expecting to hear about a decision or second interview.

Follow-Up

- ❖ Immediately after the interview jot down any notes you'll want to remember including the names and titles of the people with whom you spoke and any actions or follow-up agreed upon during the interview.
- ❖ Send a thank you letter immediately following the interview, preferably within 48 hours, to the interviewer and others with whom you met. In the letter, refer to something that impressed you from each interview, as a way to personalize each letter. Reiterate your interest in the position. (Refer to the Cover Letter Guide for more tips on writing thank you letters.)
- ❖ If you do not hear from the organization within the specified time, call your contact person. Ask about the status of your candidacy.
- ❖ If you receive a written offer, it is imperative to respond in a timely fashion. Talk to a Career Counselor if you have specific concerns about your situation.
- ❖ If you are rejected, don't panic! Perhaps there wasn't an appropriate job match. Think about it: Were you in fact really enthusiastic about the position? Did you convey this to everyone you met? It may be helpful to ask your host for feedback on your marketability and/or interview performance.

Questions Commonly Asked By Employers

"Tell me about yourself."

The key to answering this or any other interview question is to offer a response that supports your career objective. The challenge is to keep your answer short (about 1 minute) and focused.

An interviewer often asks this question to find out if you are the kind of person who will fit in well with his/her company. You do not want to give the interviewer a long biography of your life that has nothing to do with your skills and achievements. The whole point of the interview is to show that you are the right person for the job.

You may choose to tell a story that relates the origin of your interest in the career field. Another approach is to connect the personal characteristics, goals and events that motivated you to pursue this opportunity. You may also want to mention what you are really passionate about related to your career and how you might bring this passion to the company once hired.

"Why do you want to work in this industry?"

Show the interviewer that you have thought about your career path and researched in-depth the industry that you are pursuing. Show the "fit" between yourself and the industry. How do your talents complement the industry? What about the industry interests you? Discuss any industry-related experiences that you have had and how they have confirmed your interest.

"Why do you want to work here?"

Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job and the company through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company.

"What are your strengths?"

If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, and then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills.

"What are your weaknesses?"

Everyone has weaknesses, but the interviewer wants to know if you have any weaknesses that will prevent you from doing the particular job well. Discuss with the interviewer a weakness that you feel you have developed strategies to overcome. For example, if you don't like making cold calls, tell the interviewer about the phone scripts you wrote that helped you to overcome this fear. Always reassure the employer that you are confident that you can either work with or overcome the weakness.

"What are your career goals?"

The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be as specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.

"What are your extracurricular activities?"

The interviewer may be looking for evidence of your job skills outside of your professional experience. For example, hobbies such as chess or bridge demonstrate analytical skills. Reading, music, and painting are creative hobbies. Individual sports show determination and stamina, while group sport activities may indicate you are comfortable working as part of a team. Also, the interviewer might simply be curious as to whether you have a life outside of work. Employees who have creative or athletic outlets for their stress are often healthier, happier and more productive.

"Describe a difficult situation you have been through." Or "What has been your biggest challenge?"

The interviewer is interested in hearing you describe your coping skills. Think of a time you had difficulty either at school or in a career-related experience and describe it. Talk about the effective ways you handled the issue. Never speak negatively about a professor, boss or fellow student.

"Do you have any questions for me?"

Always ask two or three questions and have more prepared in advance. This is your opportunity to learn more about the employer and to demonstrate your interest in the position available. Consider asking questions about the company culture, evaluation processes, current issues the industry is facing and/or other questions that relate to the job specifically or the organization as a whole.

The interview is not the time to ask questions about salary, benefits, hours or vacation. This information may be critical for you in making your decision, but wait until you have been offered the job before asking about them.

Other questions to consider:

Your qualifications

- What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- What qualifications do you have that relate to the position?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
- Give me an example from a previous job where you've shown initiative.
- What is important to you in a job?
- What motivates you in your work?
- What qualities do you find important in a coworker/boss?

Your career goals

- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- How will you judge yourself successful? How will you achieve success?
- How will this job fit in your career plans?
- What do you expect from this job?
- Can you travel?

Your experience

- Why did you choose Hamilton College?
- What have you learned from your past jobs/experiences?
- What were your biggest responsibilities?
- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- Whom may we contact for references?

Your education

- How do you think your education has prepared you for this position?
- What were your favorite classes/activities at school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Do you plan to continue your education?

Preparation Exercise

1. What information do I have concerning the organization and job? Why am I interested in the position?
2. What is my educational background? How is it relevant to the position?
3. What is my employment background? How is my experience relevant to the position? What skills did I use in previous experiences that are relevant to this particular position?
4. What are my career goals? How do they relate to this organization?
5. What are my personal skills and abilities? How do they relate to this position/organization? What are specific examples of how I have used these skills previously?
6. My weaknesses are ? What steps am I taking to improve them?
7. What additional information do I want the interviewer to know?
8. What questions do I have for the interviewer?

*We encourage you to have at least one mock interview prior to your actual interview.
These may be scheduled through the Career Center by calling 859-4346.*

Interview Self-Evaluation

Location of the interview:

Date of the interview:

Name/Title of interviewer:

Questions I was asked:

Questions I had trouble with:

Areas about which I need more information:

What should I emphasize in a second interview for the same position?

Overall evaluation of the interview:

Interviewer feedback:

Date thank you letter was sent: