**Interview Tips & Trends**

Interviews can be great and exciting opportunities since they have the chance of leading to full-time, gainful employment, but they also can be extremely nerve-racking and stressful. Not to worry! Use the information from this workshop, and you will become an interviewing master.

**Step #1: Research**

*The Company’s Website:*

* Review the company’s mission statement and company values. This will help you gain insight into the company’s culture and ethics.
* Explore their recent news and events. What is the company highlighting about themselves? Positive press can be a great conversation topic!

*Products and Services:*

* Secure a solid understanding of what the company does. (Hint! Recruiters are likely to ask you about your knowledge of their company to assess your genuine interest.)
	+ Do they sell a product? How is that product sold? Do they offer a service? How is that service provided?
* Research specifics of what the company offers/supplies/coordinates.
	+ Do they sell a specific set of products? Do they sell to retailers or to a specific audience? What selection of specific services are provided?

*Social Media:*

* LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and even YouTube are important research tools.
* Learn more about a company’s culture. Review their posts. What are they posting about their company? Are the posts mainly numbers and figures? Or, are they posting more “fun” details? What is the tone of each post? Strict and serious or amusing and laid-back?
* ****The posts could be an indicator of the company’s culture and how interviewers will act when you meet with them. This may not always be the case from company to company, especially with a large organization whose individual branches may have their own, more specific style.
* Not every company will have a large social media presence. For example, imagine a company that specifically hires CDL-A truck drivers. Perhaps this company is small and has a time-tested hiring process where they recruit drivers from their area’s technical institutes because the graduates are great drivers. This company may be less likely to have a strong social media presence due to a lesser need for extra marketing and the associated expenses. Look for any company on the large social media sites, but do not be discouraged if you do not find a lot of information via social media for companies similar to the one in our example.

*Salary and Wage Information:*

* Establish a well-informed salary range for any given job. Include three different numbers.
	+ A low-end: This is the bottom-line amount of money you would accept to work in this position.
	+ A middle: This is the amount your research has deemed to be fair based on the job and your experience.
	+ A high-end: Including a high number could assist in securing a higher salary that might not have been offered had it not been mentioned. This higher end number may also give you more latitude when it comes to salary negotiations.
* Keep your salary range narrow enough to be realistic but wide enough to have that negotiating space (i.e. there should not be more than a $10,000 or $10 difference between your low and high end numbers)
* ****Great websites for salary research can include:
	+ Salary.com
	+ Glassdoor.com
	+ Indeed.com
	+ LinkedIn.com (Salary information on LinkedIn will be a pool in which you add a former salary to obtain similar salary information.)
	+ Onetonline.org
* You should have several different reference points for any salary range you establish. Do not only research the aforementioned list of sites. Look for reliable information on salary across a multitude of trustworthy sites.

*Industry Information:*

* Research the company’s industry. For example, let’s say that you are a nurse who is seeking employment. Research the “Medical Industry” in your area. This research is similar to researching a company. Who are the company’s competitors and what do they offer? How many people does your company of interest employ in comparison to other organizations? Does your company have a specialty that others don’t?
* While these details are unlikely to come up in a conversation with a recruiter, it is helpful to have this contextual information (and you may find more companies of interest to apply with at a later date!).

*LinkedIn and Personal Professional Network:*

* LinkedIn is a must-have for any job seeker, regardless of field. Not only will LinkedIn have material on all of the areas already covered, but it will also be a useful tool for reaching out to people to ask questions.
* ****Perhaps a connection on LinkedIn has previously interviewed with a company you are researching. Consider asking them what kind of questions their representatives asked. What seemed important to the recruiters or hiring managers when they spoke with them? Any details you can discover will assist in your research and your upcoming interactions.
* Reach out to your personal network. Ask family, friends, or acquaintances as it is quite possible that someone they know may have insight on one of the companies you are researching.

*Keep in Mind:*

* While reading employee-written reviews submitted to websites like Glassdoor.com, take any extremely negative or positive reviews with a grain of salt. These reviews are likely written out of a lot of emotion, so there could be slight embellishment in what they are saying. Take more stock into the items that are common across all of the reviews you are reading as these are likely to be more accurate than not.
* Be wary of any unmanaged or inconsistent social media. Companies who utilize social media are going to put a great deal of human capital, money, and effort into making it look professional. If you come across any social media that has spelling/grammatical mistakes, bare-bones profiles or posts, and no consistent posting pattern (for example: if a company posts something then waits three months to post something else), then it could be a red flag for a possible job scam.
* Write down questions you come up with as you are researching. These questions should be open-ended and something only a company employee could answer. If you can find it on the company’s website or through a Google search, then it should not be one you write down. These questions will become important at the end of your interview.

**Step #2: Preparation for the Interview**

It is important to preemptively ‘pack your bag’ in the few days leading up to your interview with anything that could come in handy. It is also imperative to know what you are going to wear the day of, as you will likely be a little nervous, so it is best to make to decisions days before.

*What to Bring:*

* 5 copies of your resume
* 5 copies of your reference sheet
* Pen and notepad
* 10-15 questions you wish to ask at the end of the interview
	+ Hint! Write these questions down on your notepad before-hand, so you don’t forget them
* Examples of past work
* Certifications/work-permits
* Photo ID
* Breath mints (Don’t led bad breath be a detriment to your interview)
* Name and phone number of the interviewer(s)
	+ Hint! Consider saving this contact information as a temporary contact in your phone in case any emergencies happen on your way to the interview (traffic or being late is NOT an emergency)
* A positive demeanor ☺

*What Not to Bring:*

* Cell phone/electronic device/smart watches (turn off)
* Children or any other person (do NOT have someone wait in the lobby for you)
* Cigarettes
	+ Do not smoke for four hours before you interview
	+ Do not smoke in your interview clothes
* Excessive perfume or cologne
* Excessive jewelry
* Excessive piercings
* Uncovered tattoos (if they need to/can be covered)
* Flashy or overly bright clothing
* Gum/Food
* Coffee/Soda/Juice
* Water bottle of any kind
	+ You don’t want the extra baggage, especially since they will likely offer you water when you arrive

*What to Wear:*

When it comes to an interview, **business professional is always the best way to go**. Typically this means a suit, however, this still depends on what kind of work you do and what your work environment will be. If you are going to work in a location like a factory, plant, or warehouse, just to name a few examples, then a suit is likely **not** a smart option. In those cases, most companies will not have that kind of office dress code nor culture, so it would be overdressing to wear a suit to an interview. Instead opt out for a collared shirt/blouse and a pressed pair of slacks.

Here are some more specific tips:

For Women:

* Conservative colors (black, navy-blue, light blues, gray, white)
* Collared shirt or blouse
* Blazer
* Slacks
* Professional length skirt/dress (1 inch past your index finger)
* Flats or short heels
* Subtle make-up and jewelry
* Neat hairstyle

For Men:

* Conservative colors (black, navy-blue, light blues, gray, white)
* Collared shirt
* Slacks
* Matching tie (solid colors, avoid anything with too much of a pattern
* Polished shoes with a matching belt
* Neat hairstyle and groomed facial hair

General Tips:

* Your clothes should be clean
* No rips or tears
* Nothing should be too tight, nor too loose
* No jeans or t-shirts
* No orange (statistically the worst color to wear to an interview)

*Do a Test-Run of your Route:*

* Drive to the location of the interview prior to the date to be aware of traffic patterns, construction, bus stops, school zones, etc., so you are not late to your interview (Hint! Drive at the same time of day you would leave for the interview)

**Step #3: The Interview**

The interview begins the moment you arrive on company property. You never know when the company might be watching you as you arrive or even if an employee might casually glance out the window. Regardless, you should have the “interview you” turned on the moment you arrive.

* If you are driving to the interview, be sure to turn down any loud music from your car
* Make sure your car is clean on the inside and outside
* If you are taking public transportation, be sure to put away any headphones you might have been using
* Greet anyone and everyone you meet with a smile and a pleasant demeanor
	+ Hint! You never know who’s an employee or not, so always be professional and polite

*While you are Waiting:*

* Greet the receptionist and be very kind to that person as you never know what impression they may give your interviewer
* Tell them who you are and whom you are here to see
* Thank them for their assistance
* Sit down and upright in the lobby/waiting area
* Avoid having too many items on your lap in order to get up gracefully
* Any items like a coat, purse, pad folio which you might be holding should be in your left hand or on your left side (you will be shaking with your right hand)
* Do not play with your phone, nor take it out (unless you have to in order to fill out an application or form)
* Take some time to review your research notes
* Fill out any application or form in blue or black ink



*Meeting your Interviewer(s):*

First impressions are **everything**. People make an impression of someone they meet within the first 10 seconds. You do not want to start out with a bad first impression, so heed the following tips in order to stand out.

* Rise from your seat in the waiting area gracefully, ideally having your right hand free and any objects you brought easy to grab and go
* Look the interviewer directly in the eye, smile, and give a firm handshake
* Use phrases such as, “It’s such a pleasure to meet you! I’m so-and-so!” to begin the conversation
* Be sure you know how to pronounce your interviewer’s name correctly before the interview
	+ Hint! If you are not sure how to pronounce, then a friend or family member likely will
* Wait to sit until being offered a seat in the interview room so as to not come off as rude

*Body Language:*

What you say is far from the only thing an interviewer will take into account when speaking to you! Your body language, i.e. what your expressions and gestures say, will mean so much more than you might realize.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Avoid doing the following: | Do the following: |
| Crossing arms or legs | Use minor hand gestures to extenuate points |
| Leaning too far back in the chair/slouching | Lean *slightly* toward the interviewer to demonstrate interest |
| Nervous habits (playing with your hair, touching your face, cracking knuckles, clicking pens, etc.) | Place your hands above a table or desk (if appropriate) should one be between the interviewer and yourself |



Eye contact and how you smile are two other aspects of body language which are important to be mindful of. Neither of these should be done the entire time.

Do your best to avoid staring down the interviewer as this will likely make them feel uncomfortable or awkward. Use direct eye contact 2/3’s of the time during such times as:

* When the interviewer asks you a question
* When you begin to answer a question
* When you or the interviewer are talking about some of your favorite topics

When you are not engaged in direct eye contact, look around the room to show that you’re thinking, but never stray too far from the interviewer’s line of sight.

The same practice applies to how you smile. Holding a constant smile will be uncomfortable for both you and the interviewer, so maintain an amiable demeanor without smiling the entire time. Ideally you want to smile right, meaning a smile should come out during the same times you are engaged in direct eye contact with your interviewer (as listed above). It is also helpful to smile when you are leaving the interview.

**Step #4: Answering Tough Interview Questions**

The main attraction of every interview is the list of questions you will need to answer to prove to the interviewer that you are the best person for the job. There are a lot of questions that can be asked in an interview, so it is difficult to review them all, but we can use the STAR Method to help us in answering them.

The STAR Method is a popular interviewing technique that gives you a basic outline of an answer. STAR stands for the following: Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Situation:**What obstacle or instance are you describing? | **Task:** What needs to be accomplished to address the situation? |
| **Action:**What do you decide to do, specifically? | **Result:** What was the outcome of your decision? |

The STAR Method is a great way to stop any of those ‘deer in the headlights’ moments from happening in the midst of an interview as it is a great springboard for your answerer to some of those behavioral questions. It is not meant as a process you must adhere to for every single question, but a jumping off point to help you get started.

*Tough Interview Questions:*

***Tell me a little more about yourself.***

This is one of the first questions that will likely come up to break the ice. They may be looking for you to expand upon the information you provided in your application or ask what you like to do outside of your professional life. Do not refer them to your resume. Take the time to discuss your value. If they ask about your personal hobbies, be sure to keep them workplace appropriate, professionally-related, and brief. They are not looking for an autobiography.

***What do you know about our company?***

An alarming amount of job seekers will not be able to answer this question. Make sure you are not one of them. Refer to your research for this question and answer it in a way that demonstrates your astute knowledge of the company. Do not just tell the interviewer what their company does. Expand on this information by talking about all of the little things in-between. For example, if a company makes healthcare products, talk about the places those products are sold, how the products are distributed, who uses the products, etc. Use your thorough understanding of a company to impress an interviewer and stand out among the other applicants.

***Why do you want to work for us?***

This is one of the toughest questions to answer during interviews, but if you answer it correctly, then you are likely to give the interviewer a great impression of you as a candidate. Just as with the previous question, a recruiter will ask this to see if you have done your research on their company. Make sure you know the company’s mission statement and values by heart and bring those up as part of your reasoning, i.e. let the interviewer know you believe in their mission and the work they do. Explain your passions and how you can use that energy in their company.

***Tell me more about your skills.***

Pick out a few of your top skills and explain how you have proven them in the past. It is best to bring up specific examples from your past work experiences, *and* talk about them in a way the interviewer can see those skills utilized at their company.

***What are your career goals?***

This question is the same as the question, “Where do you see yourself in X years?” The interviewer is trying to figure out if you will be a long term employee or, in their eyes, a good return on investment if they hire you. Talk about your drive to land a role with their company and grow internally. You can also discuss your industry specific goals. Knowledge or milestones you hope to reach within your own career are valuable pieces of information to bring up as well.

***Can you tell me about your past work experience?***

When this question is asked, it is likely the interviewer is looking for more information about your background. Answer this question honestly and give brief descriptions of your past roles. Talk about the work you did, the kind of tools or software you are familiar with, any products or services you are knowledgeable within your industry, etc. When discussing companies, try to avoid specifics about reasons as to why you left a company, lay-offs, terminations, etc. as you do not want to concern the recruiter about your long-term employability.

*Questions to ask the Interviewer:*

Once you have completed the interview, the interviewer will likely ask if you have any questions for them. Your answer to this question is always going to be yes, as not asking any questions may make you appear uninterested in the rest of the process.

Please refer to your research for more specific questions (ones you should have written down at this point) and refer to the following list for some more general questions:

* How would you describe the company culture?
* Can you describe a typical day at your company?
* How is performance measured at your company?
* What does your training process involve?
* What do you like most about working for your company?
* What characteristic is most important for a person in X position?
* What challenges are facing X position?
* What challenges are facing X position’s department?
* What challenges are facing the company?
* What is a typical career path for someone in this company/in X position?
* What is the company’s management style?
* Can you tell me a little about your hiring process?
* Do you have any other questions about me?

**Step #5: Follow-Up and The Rule of 2**

Once you have completed the interview, be sure to thank the interviewer for their time. It is imperative you ask for some form of contact information to follow-up with. There are two options you can try:

* Ask for a business card (if the interviewer(s) did not already give you one)
* If they do not have a business card, ask if they (or you) can write their information for you to keep

Thank them again, and exit the building appropriately. Your next step to relax and reflect on the interview. Once you feel settled, it will be time to write a thank-you email.

Thank-you emails are a crucial step of any interview process. Some companies even use a thank-you email as a checkmark for their candidates, so you must send one. Be sure to keep it brief and make it personal to the interviewer (so if you had multiple interviewers, they should **NOT** be receiving the same email).

Use the following example to write your own thank-you emails:

**SUBJECT LINE:** Thank You – Administrative Assistant Interview

**BODY OF THE EMAIL:**

Dear [INTERVIEWER’S NAME],

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Administrative Assistant position at your company. I really enjoyed our conversation. It was especially pleasant to hear about your personal experiences with your growth at the company.

This position seems to be a great match for my skills and interests. As I mentioned this morning, I possess great organizational skills which I hope to bring to this position.

Thank you again for the time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out to me if you need any more information.

Have a great day! (if you feel this is appropriate)

Best,

Frank Jobseeker

While viewing this sample, keep the following items in mind:

* Subject line: Thank You – [POSITION TITLE] Interview
* Dear [INTERVIEWER’S NAME]
* Thank the interviewer for their time and consideration
* Express how pleasant the interview was
* Let them know you felt it was an extremely valuable experience
* If the interview team took you on a tour of the facility/office, be sure to specifically thank them for that as well
* Remind the interviewer of your skills and how you would make a great match for the position
* If there were multiple interviewers, be sure to bring up something specific you spoke about with each one
* Thank them one last time, tell them you look forward to hearing their decision, and offer the ability to reach out to you should they have any further questions.

**The thank-you email should always be sent within 24 hours of the interview’s start time!!!**

*The Rule of 2:*

After the thank-you email is sent, allow the company to come back to you with a decision. If they take longer than expected to get back to you, then it is appropriate to send another email reminding them you are still eagerly awaiting their decision. If they take even more time after that, then another email is appropriate, but that is the Rule of 2. You send no more than two follow-up emails after the thank-you email. Sending more or over-contacting the interviewer will make you come off as a nuisance and hurt your chances of receiving an offer.

Even if you feel 100% confident you are going to get the role, continue with your job search so as to not put all of you hopes in one position. You never know when they might get back to you (if at all in some cases), so keep job searching.

**Good luck!**