

BERRY COLLEGE CAREER CENTER
INTERVIEW PREPARATION & PROCESS

Once you have secured the interview, you should begin to focus on interview preparation. Do not be fooled into thinking that you can simply walk into an interview and answer a few questions. Your goal must be to demonstrate your interest and qualifications for the position. Preparation, research and practice are the key! Many candidates are not chosen due to the lack of interview preparation or an inability to articulate "fit" for the position.

1. Preparation

- Know general information about the position for which you are interviewing.
- Articulate your qualifications and interest.
- Research the organization.

2. Analyze the position

- Understand the Position. To gather this information, you may start with research in the Career Library. Current resources such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the Information and Skills sections of FOCUS 2, provide up-to-date information regarding job responsibilities, employment outlook, educational requirements, starting salaries, and required skills. This basic research will prove valuable as you prepare to demonstrate a match between your credentials and the position for which you are interviewing.

- Participate in an internship in a field you wish to pursue. This will help you gain experience and provide you with first-hand knowledge of the field. If you are not able to participate in internships, try conducting informational interviews to gather information on specific career fields.

3. Research the Organization

- Determine the nature of the organization. A demonstrated knowledge of the organization will also help convince the interviewer of your interest. In order to ascertain sincere interest, many interviewers will begin the process with a question such as, "Why are you interested in our organization?" It is a mistake to assume you know enough about the organization without conducting any research. Through your research, you should become familiar with:
 - Type of organization and its function
 - Major competitors
 - Major products or services
 - Sales and earnings (if company is a for-profit organization)
 - Size in terms of sales and employees
 - Location (other than your community)
 - Latest news reports on the company
 - New trends in the field

- Key people in the organization

Sources of Information

The Career Resource Library, Memorial Library, and public libraries have business periodicals and newspapers to help you research company trends and noteworthy ventures. For Atlanta-based companies, you may consider researching articles that have appeared in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* or the *Atlanta Business Chronicle*. In addition, the following publications are well-respected sources of information:

- *The Wall Street Journal*
- *Business Week*
- *Forbes*
- *Fortune*

Also, consider articles from trade publications and professional associations.

If you are interviewing with a privately held company or agency, try identifying employees or volunteers (for non-profit agencies) to gather information; the Chamber of Commerce may also be able to provide limited information.

4. Market Your Skills: The Product is YOU!

- Review your qualifications for the position. Expressing yourself clearly and concisely is an essential element of effective interviewing. Self-assessment of your skills, interests, and work values will help you organize your thoughts in order to project a positive impression. A thorough self-assessment, as discussed on page 5 should enable you to:
 - Summarize your educational experiences as related to the position for which you are interviewing
 - Articulate your related skills and abilities that the employer is seeking
 - Cite examples of how you developed/ used particular skills
 - Know your personal strengths and weaknesses
 - Discuss your work and extracurricular experiences in detail
 - Talk about your career goals and objectives
 - Know where you want to work
 - Identify any problem areas in your background and be prepared to discuss them

The first interview is typically called a screening interview. It may take place on campus (through the On-Campus Interview Program), at a job fair, or at the employer's office. This type of interview generally lasts 30 minutes to one hour. The purpose of the screening interview is to separate qualified applicants from unqualified ones. An invitation for a second interview may be offered in a few days from the screening interview or it may take up to four weeks. Usually, only a small percentage of candidates will be invited back for the second interview.

The second interview is an in-depth interview conducted at the site of the organization. It may last anywhere from one hour to two days. Some employers may even call you back three or four times before making a decision regarding your candidacy. It is up to you to demonstrate enthusiasm and "fit" for the position.

Practice Makes Perfect

Interviewing is a skill. Start by preparing for general questions regarding education, grades, work experience, and interests. The Lindquist-Endicott Report, on pages of the most frequently asked questions.

For some, writing down answers may help in preparing; for others, practicing verbal responses will be more effective. It is not enough to simply read the questions; you should plan your responses. Videotaped mock interviews, conducted by the Career Center staff, are highly recommended as an effective means of testing your level of preparation. To schedule a mock interview, call the Career Center.

First Impressions

As cliché as it may sound, you will not get a second chance to make a first impression when it comes to interviews. Your nonverbal skills and the manner in which you present yourself will be evaluated in addition to your verbal responses to interview questions.

Be sure to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes early. This will provide you with time to check your appearance and collect your thoughts prior to the interview. Be sure to greet the receptionist, secretary, and others in the office in a friendly and courteous manner. These employees often have some influence in the hiring process.

When the employer greets you, be sure to stand and offer a firm handshake (women too!). If the employer mispronounces your name, clearly state your name as you shake his/her hand. The only thing that you should be carrying is a portfolio with paper and pen; leave your coat and book bag (if you are interviewing on campus) in the waiting area unless otherwise instructed. You are always encouraged to take an extra copy of your resume with you for all interviews. For on-site interviews, women may also carry a small, professional-looking purse.

As you enter the interview room, wait for the employer to indicate where you should be seated. After the employer is seated, it is your cue to also take a seat. During the interview, remember to practice good nonverbal skills:

- Sit up straight with your shoulders back and hands resting in your lap
- Place both feet on the floor
- Maintain eye contact to demonstrate interest and enthusiasm
- Use limited hand gestures to emphasize key points
- Be aware of nervous movements such as tapping of your foot or playing with a ring

- Try to smile when responding to questions (when appropriate); a smile will indicate confidence and enthusiasm
- Try to relax; you will find that you are better able to respond to questions if you simply relax a little.

The Interview Process

The interview generally consists of five stages: introduction and icebreaker; verifying information and asking questions; responding to your questions; closing the interview; and decision-making.

1. Basic Introduction and "ice breaker." The interviewer will try to establish rapport with you talking about an unrelated topic such as the weather. Keep all of your comments positive, even if the weather is terrible that day; the employer will have concerns if you begin by complaining about small, insignificant events.

2. Next, the employer will begin asking questions and verifying information from your resume. As each question is posed, take a moment to consider your answer. Start your response in a positive note; be careful not to start with "um" or another verbal filler. Be sure to provide specific examples of accomplishments to demonstrate skills.

A helpful outline for answering interview questions is best described through the S.O.A.R. (situation, obstacle, action, result) method. Using this method, you would respond to an interview question with an example of a situation or tasks for which you were responsible. Thoroughly describe the actions that you took in this situation or task. Emphasize specific results or accomplishments. Remember, numbers can be impressive. Always speak in first person when describing the situation. Whenever possible, try to articulate the value of the experience in terms of how the experience has prepared you for the position for which you are interviewing. Do not be overly concerned if the interviewer is taking notes during the interview process. Keep your composure and try to keep your eyes level so that when the employer looks up, you will have eye contact.

3. Following this stage, the employer will ask for your questions. Again, this is an important part of the process as it provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your research and interest. Before each interview, you should carefully prepare two or three questions based on your research. This is **not** the time to ask questions concerning salary or benefits. You may ask for clarification on information that you have read. Check the Career Center for examples of questions you might ask employers. If you do not have any questions for the employer, he/she may think that you are not interested. Following your questions, you may take a minute to summarize your interests and qualifications.

4. The fourth stage of the interview process is the close, which is initiated by the interviewer. A seasoned interviewer will explain the decision-making process and provide information concerning future steps in the process. If the interviewer does not specifically state this information, it is appropriate for you to ask about follow-up

procedures. Be sure to ask the interviewer for his/her business card; this information will be helpful as you prepare your thank you letter.

After the interview, the employer will assess your qualifications and determine the "fit" between you and the position. This is also a time for you to evaluate your interest in the position. Immediately following your interview, take time to write down questions you were asked, general impressions, and questions that you may now have as a result of the interview. Also, evaluate your interviewing skills and consider ways you can improve for your next interview. Remember to send a thank you letter to the employer within 24 hours after your interview.

Interview Attire

The way you dress for your interview will tell the employer about your professionalism, and in some cases, will be one of the factors an employer will take into account in evaluating you as a candidate. Your ability to "dress the part" speaks to your knowledge of the industry and interest in "fitting in." You will probably dress more professionally for an interview than may be required once you begin working in that environment. Appropriate interview attire will vary by field, however you are best advised to dress professionally using the following guidelines:

- The suit is the basic element of the interview wardrobe for both men and women interested in business and government careers; teacher candidates often wear suits although tailored dresses are now acceptable for women.
- Tones of blue and gray are most appropriate colors for suits; simple fabric patterns such as narrow pinstripes, muted plaids, and tweeds project a professional look.
- Men should realize that pants and a sports coat will not give the same professional appearance as a coordinated suit.
- Always be sure that clothes are carefully pressed and that shoes are polished.
- Women should wear hemlines at the knee or lower.
- Pants and pant suits are still not acceptable for women in most interview situations.
- Keep jewelry, perfume/cologne to a minimum.
- Overall, try to create a conservative, polished appearance.
- Candidates interested in nonprofit work and creative fields have more flexibility in interview attire; always be sure you are neat and pressed.