



Effective Interviews

CAREER CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO at MISSISSAUGA

The secret to performing well in an interview is to **BE PREPARED**. Reduced to the essentials, interview preparation consists of 3 things: knowing yourself, knowing the position, and knowing the organization. This tipsheet is designed to guide you through your preparation and point out some of the key resources you may want to consult for further advice.

Know yourself: Know what you have to offer. Your education, your interests and your experiences have given you a wide range of skills. Be able to articulate the skills you have, how you developed them, and recent examples (within the last few years) of how you used them.

Know the position for which you are interviewing: Be able to relate your skills to the duties and responsibilities of that position.

Know the organization: Research! Research! Research! Try to go beyond the obvious easy-to-find information about the organization and its needs. Begin with the organization's web site, and then research external sites for background information. Keep up to date with company/industry press releases via www.canadanewswire.ca. The best way to learn about organizations is by speaking to company representatives—attend panels, career fairs, make cold-calls, and network.

Here are some questions to consider in your research:

- What is the nature of the organization's business?
- What have they done (get a sense of its history)?
- Where are they headed in the next year (objectives, strategy, growth)?
- Who are their competitors?
- How would this organization define success?
- What are the organization's values (e.g., mission statement)?
- Are there any organizational changes occurring?
- What is the outlook for the industry in which that organization operates?
- What things affect the industry?

Types of Interviews

Once you have done the research, **prepare for the interview** by (1) identifying the key assets you have that meet the employer's needs, based on your research of the position and the organization, and then (2) anticipating the sorts of questions you may be asked and rehearsing your responses, and (3) preparing questions you want to ask the interviewer.

Interviews don't come in one standard format. The most common types include behavioural interviews, panel interviews (more than one interviewer), one-on-one interviews, case interviews and telephone interviews. To prepare, ask what format your interview will be in and who will be conducting it (write down interviewer's names and positions).

Typical Questions

In most interviews, regardless of the format, there is a common underlying structure. Here are some examples of the types of questions you may encounter at each interview stage.

1. The Icebreaker and Introduction

A good interviewer wants you to be comfortable and relaxed. To establish this sort of atmosphere, they will ask you a few rapport-building or "small talk" questions (e.g., questions about the weather, parking difficulties, current events in the news, or one of your hobbies).

2. Questions about You

You will be asked general questions about your skills and experiences.

- What are your major strengths/weaknesses? (Remember to select those that, based on your research of the position/organization will be of most relevance to the employer. When stating your weakness, explain thoroughly what you are doing to improve that particular weakness)
- What kind of environment do you work best in?
- What are your career goals?

You will also encounter questions that ask you to specifically relate your skills to the various duties and responsibilities of the position.

- How long would it take you to edit 2000 words?
- How would you analyze current economic and market conditions in Japan?
- What methods would you employ to present the data from your microbial testing to senior management?

Before you answer each question, take a moment to compose yourself and think about what skill the interviewer is looking for (they may not always ask direct questions). When you answer the



question, be sure to give a recent example of a **specific situation** (from work, academic, volunteer or extracurricular experiences) where you had to use or develop that skill. If you lack direct experience, think of other situations where you have had to use related skills. (No one expects an undergraduate or recent graduate to know it all. Demonstrating related experience you can draw from and build on will leave a good impression).

Remember...interviewers are also looking for things such as confidence and poise, personality traits, presentations, the ability to think quickly, level of energy and drive, resourcefulness and so on...these are critical aspects that help them determine your suitability or 'fit' with the organization.

3. Behavioural Questions

This type of question is quite common. It is based on a belief that past behaviour is the best prediction of future behaviour. Interviewers want to determine how you react in situations that could occur in the position for which you are interviewing. Using **STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Results)** can be an effective way of answering behavioural based questions (STAR is reviewed in the Effective Interviews Workshop offered at the Career Centre).

- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Describe a time when you faced a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give an example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment in solving a problem.

4. Case Interviews

Case interviews are broadly defined as an interview geared around solving problems on the spot. They are commonly used in fields such as consulting and investment banking. The problem can be presented in many formats, but in every case interview, the interviewer is trying to judge for logical thought process, general business knowledge and acumen, general knowledge, comfort with qualitative analysis, creativity, and communication skills. Case interview questions generally fall into three formats, listed here with sample questions:

Brain Teasers

There are eight balls, one of which is slightly heavier than the others. You have a scale that you can use for weighing, but you are only allowed to use it twice. How do you find the heavier ball?

Market Sizing

How many golf balls were lost in England this year? Or, How many Air Canada Aeroplan miles are outstanding?

Project

You are consulting for one of the largest supermarket chains in the country. This chain is considering opening its own bank branches in its supermarket locations. What is your advice?

For further information on case interviews refer to titles like Wetfeet's *Ace Your Case* or *The Fast Track* available in the Career Resource Library, or visit Quintessential Careers for an excellent selection of links at:
http://www.quintcareers.com/case_interview_resources.html

5. Closure and Questions Asked By YOU

After the interviewer(s) has asked all of their questions, they will give you a chance to ask your questions (prepare 3-5 questions in advance). Ask thoughtful and intelligent questions that involve the interviewer in discussion and reflect how in-depth your company research has been. It is a final opportunity to articulate why you are the best person for the position. Potential questions include:

- What are this year's goals for this position and department?
- How does your firm support further learning and skills development in this position? (e.g., via attending professional development sessions, seminars, membership with industry associations, etc).

Tips and Strategies

1. Do a practice interview first, with someone you know acting as the interviewer. This will give you a chance to rehearse possible answers. You can also sign-up in person at the Career Centre for a practice interview with a career counsellor.
2. During the interview, you will be judged by how effectively you communicate, verbally and nonverbally. Make frequent eye contact with each interviewer, smile, and dress in professional attire.
3. Before you answer each question, take a moment to compose yourself and think about what skills the interviewer is really looking for. Ask for clarification if you are uncertain what a question means.
4. Employers are limited as to the type of questions they can ask. Questions about marital status or country of origin, for example, are illegal in Canada. For more information visit <http://www.ohrc.on.ca>
5. Make sure you send a thank you note/card, email, or make a thank you phone-call after the interview (within 24 hours). This is also an opportunity for you to clarify or add to anything you said in the interview and to re-state your interest in the position.

UTM Career Centre Resource Library Resources

- *Nail the Job Interview 2003*, by Caryl & Ron Krannich
- *Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions 1997*, by Matthew DeLuca
- *The Job Hunter's Word Finder: Complete Guide to Key Words and Phrases for Interviews...1996*, by James Bluemond

Career Centre Videotapes, Ask at Front Desk

- *Get the Scoop on Interviews*, St. George Career Centre, 2002 (Panelists: IBM, Procter & Gamble, Bain & Company)
- *Interview Panel*, UTM Career Centre, 2001 (Panelists: Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Apotex, RBC Financial Group)

Effective Interview Workshop and Practice Interviews are held regularly at the UTM Career Centre. For dates of upcoming sections, check our web site (www.utm.utoronto.ca/careers) phone 905-828-5451, or drop by (South Building, 3094).

Disclaimer: While every attempt was made to provide accurate information on this document, information is liable to change.

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