

INTERVIEWING

Before the interview: Prepare and practice!

- Know your resume
- Review the job description
- Research the organization; its culture; policies
- Be familiar with current events affecting the industry
- Practice your “Tell Me about Yourself,” - one to two minute description of who you are professionally, which builds rapport with the interviewer(s)
- Ask for the name and title of all of the interviewer(s). Research their role in the organization, including their accomplishments
- Find out the duration of the interview in order to allocate your time and scheduling for that day. Focus on your interview.

Be prompt and prepared:

- Dress appropriately - business attire
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early. Bring extra copies of your resume, your list of references, a pen and paper, as well as samples of your work.
- Be sure to prepare a list of questions to ask your interviewer.

During the interview:

- Act professionally. Give a firm handshake. Make eye contact with the interviewer(s).
- The interview should be a give and take conversation. You are interviewing the organization as much as they are interviewing you.
- A positive attitude helps so be enthusiastic. Demonstrate your excitement about this position.

BASIC INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

Employers use a variety of techniques. The first two are the most common:

1. Question and answer: a prepared set of questions asked to each candidate
 - a. Be prepared to answer questions more than once, if multiple interviews
2. Behavior-based: past behavior/experience as indicator of future behavior.
3. Case approach: problem posed for you to analyze and resolve. (What would you do if...)
4. Stress approach: your response to adverse situations as gauged by interruptions, challenges

DISCUSSING YOUR RESUME

In discussions of your resume, you are very likely to be asked to:

- Fill in any time gaps
- Describe how your experience has prepared you for this position
- Explain accomplishments in previous jobs/school, promotions, additional responsibilities
- Describe your experience in areas such as:
 - Research
 - Writing
 - Program administration, development, and management
 - Implementation (program, project, event)
 - Team/group participation
 - Leadership/supervisory roles
 - Budget management
 - Other areas relevant to position/organization
- Describe what you gained from a given experience
- Describe challenges you encountered and how you dealt with them
- Back up an answer with specific examples

WHAT ARE THE COMMON QUESTIONS - EMPLOYER WANTS TO KNOW?

Prepare yourself by carefully considering all of the above; drafting answers; then refining your answers to the common questions listed below. Glassdoor (www.glassdoor.com) has compiled 50 most common interview questions - <http://www.glassdoor.com/blog/common-interview-questions/>

- Why are you interested in this job, and what qualifies you for it? (Present points about the organization and job, and describe skills/qualifications: How the job and organization match your aims and talents, how you fit the job and organization. What you have to offer, how you will be an asset. *For internships only:* What you hope to learn, the experience you are eager to gain as well as what you bring.)
- How/Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What would you like to accomplish on the job?
- What is your ideal job?
- What books have you read lately; what do you like to do in your spare time?
- Why have you chosen - your concentration, e.g., land-use planning, international development - as your field? (Describe the value of field and what has drawn you to it.)
- Describe a professional success, especially one in which you convinced either your colleagues/superiors or a group/client of something. (Describe your studio project)
- Describe a professional challenge, a difficult project, and the steps you took to surmount it.
- Describe a collaborative or team effort and your role in it.
- Describe how you kept those involved in your project and describe the progress.
- How good of a writer are you?
- How good of a GIS specialist are you?
- How good are you at public presentations?

- Describe a conflict or problem analysis and how you resolved it.
- What are you most proud of?
- What do you do when priorities change?
- Describe a leadership situation you would have handled differently.
- By providing example(s) demonstrate that you can adapt to a wide variety of people.
- Can you handle pressure? Can you think clearly on your feet? How did you react to a stressful situation? What made you decide to handle it that way?
- Can you handle more than one project at a time?
- What value do you add to the organization? What skills do you bring?
- What steps would you take to develop group support for a project or proposition?
- How flexible and adaptable are you?
- How do you cope with having to compromise?
- Give me an example of a time when there was a decision to be made and procedures were not in place. What was the outcome?
- What is the greatest challenge you ever faced and how did you resolve it? How do you cope with challenges? Differences of opinion? Do you ask for help? Do you offer help?
- What are your strengths? (Answer on a professional, not personal, level and in terms of the position you're applying for; back up with examples)
- What are your weaknesses? (Regard this question as pertaining to a 'skills' or 'experience' weakness, on a professional, not personal level. Focus answer on how some previous experience you have had will speed your learning, how you are eager to develop your skill in this area, and how you will go about improving this skill; e.g., have done mostly research, but look forward to refining public presentation skills. Also discuss how familiarity with slightly different situations might transfer well.)
- What is your value to this organization? What do you bring that is unique? (Describe your strengths, specifically and overall, including the skills, experience and attributes that, together, set you apart/above as a candidate. Do not discount skills outside the expected or required ones; these may make the difference between you and another candidate; e.g., business or finance, web design, student leadership.)
- (If you are applying for an advanced position.) Have you ever supervised anyone, and how have you dealt with problems? (If, for instance, this is a weakness, address as above.)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & SAMPLE ANSWERS:

Why are you seeking a position with our company?

Indicate that from your study of the company, the issues they face are the kind that excite you and match up well with your skills, abilities and past experience. Speak honestly in expressing your admiration and what it is that appeals to you about the organization.

If we were to offer you this position, what changes would you make in our organization?

Be careful about describing sweeping changes you might want to make. Unless the interviewer has specified critical problem areas that you feel comfortable addressing, limit your answer to explaining the need to study the current organization, talk with staff, and fully assess the implications before recommending any changes.

What other types of work or companies are you considering at this time?

If you are interviewing elsewhere refer to your search in a general way, but concentrate mainly on this position. ** Show enthusiasm and express strongly your interest in this position for which you are interviewing (even if you have other jobs you are pursuing in which you are more interested!)

What sort of relationships do you have with your co-workers?

This is an important question, so you will want to take the time to answer it in logical steps. When speaking of managers, indicate your interest in understanding your manager's expectations, so that you and the organization can build your goals in a way that will support his or her goals. You can talk about being highly communicative, i.e. keeping your supervisor informed; stressing your team building skills; emphasizing your collaborative approach with your co-workers.

What are some of your outside recreational activities?

Your answer can show how well-rounded you are and that you lead a balanced life. But avoid mentioning so many activities that there is doubt on how much time you will have for the job.

What can you offer us that other candidates cannot?

Respond by emphasizing your unique qualities and capabilities. Relate them to this position whenever possible.

What are your strengths?

You should be able to enumerate three or four of your key strengths (with examples) that are relevant to their needs based on your research and other data you have gathered about the organization.

How successful have you been so far?

Be prepared to define success for yourself and then respond. Try to choose accomplishments that relate to the organization's needs and values if you have been able to determine that from your research.

What are your limitations? Tell me about a time your work was criticized. What was your biggest business mistake?

When discussing mistakes or criticism, emphasize what you learned and how your behavior is different as a result of the experience. Do not claim to be flawless.

Can you tell me about an objective in your last job that you failed to meet? Why?

If there was an objective that you were unable to meet for legitimate reasons, discuss it with an explanation of the obstacles over which you had no control. Or mention an objective which you renegotiated when you realized it could not be met because of obstacles beyond your control. Above all, state what you learned as a result of the experience.

How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our organization?

More and more companies are looking for people who can "hit the ground running." They don't have time to bring people up to speed with on-the-job training. Think about your accomplishments and select one that is indicative of the kind of work you can do.

What were some situations in which you worked under pressure or met deadlines?

Refer to your accomplishments. Discuss one or two in which you were especially effective in meeting deadlines or dealing with high-pressure situations.

If I spoke with your previous manager, what would he or she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Be consistent with what you think he or she would say. Position any weakness in a positive way. Use examples, not just words. Your former manager will probably want to give you a good reference, so recount some of the positive things you did for him or her. Give one or two examples of your creativity. Refer to accomplishments that relate to the company and the position.

What are your ambitions for the future?

Indicate your desire to concentrate on doing the immediate work well – and your confidence that the future will be promising. You do not want to convey that you have no desire to progress, but you need to avoid statements that are unrealistic, or that might threaten present incumbents.

What do you know about our company?

If you have done your homework, you should have any publicly available information or facts regarding the organization. However, if you would like to know more, be prepared to ask intelligent questions.

What important trends do you see coming in our industry?

Choose two or three important developments to discuss. This is an opportunity to show that you have thought about the future, the economics, the markets, the technology of the industry, and that you have done your research.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

This type of interview consists of questions to determine if a candidate has demonstrated a particular behavior. The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation.

Prepare your answers in this manner: describe the circumstance; the duties associated with the situation; the action steps taken to achieve or solve; the outcome. When asked a behavioral question, it is important to provide specific examples rather than general ones. Answer questions related to the skills and characteristics that the company is seeking. The following are suggested behavioral interview questions:

Relationship building - Develops professional relationships with others that earn their respect and trust; understands and values differences among team members.

1. Tell me about a time when it was difficult for you to work with another person. Describe the situation. What did you do?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to work with people (another person) who wanted the work done differently than you. Describe the situation. What did you do?

Communication - Responds promptly to others' requests and coordinates appropriate follow up; demonstrates effective listening by asking follow-up questions to clarify.

1. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with someone who approached things differently than you. What did you say?
2. Tell me about a time when it was difficult to get others (another person) to do something. What was the situation? What did you say?

Team Commitment - Aware of own role as a member of a team; cooperates with others to achieve team goals

1. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a group or a team that did not go so well. What was not working well and what did you do?

Initiative - Seeks to improve own performance; seeks and incorporates coaching and feedback from others.

1. Tell me about your most challenging accomplishment or achievement from the past 2-3 years. What was it and what did you do?
2. Tell me about the most frustrating experience you've had, thus far, in your career (academic or work).

Problem Solving - Learns from mistakes and is open to new ideas and suggestions regarding processes and methods; meets productivity goals, deadlines and budgets in areas of responsibility; prioritizes appropriately.

1. Tell me about the most complex assignment or project you have worked on. Describe the process. What did you do?
2. Tell me about a specific problem you had to solve in your last job. What steps did you take to gather information needed to solve it?

Adaptability - Adapts his/her plans to better handle a sudden change that arises; faces sudden change, ambiguity and uncertainty with confidence.

1. Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something unexpected (i.e. new or on short notice). What did you do?

Client Service - Responsible for product quality, thoroughness, and accuracy; demonstrates awareness of risk management policies and procedures; recognizes the importance of business growth activities (to the organization).

1. Tell me about something you're glad you got a chance to do that benefited someone else. How did it come about?
2. Tell me about a time you worked on a project (school or work) when you believe you

achieved excellence and exceeded the expectations of your supervisor/faculty.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Do's

1. Prepare for the interview by compiling a list of your strengths and weaknesses, accomplishments and answers to typical questions.
2. Have your resume in front of you to refer to when speaking about your work experience.
3. Have a pen and paper available to take notes.
4. Be in a quiet place alone – turn off the radio, television and any other background noise that might be distracting.
5. Take a moment to think about the question, and, then, respond speaking slowly and clearly.
6. Smile during the phone interview to project a positive tone in your voice and your image.
7. Send a thank-you note after the phone interview to reiterate your interest in the position.

Don'ts

1. Smoke, eat or chew gum or candy during the interview.
2. Ramble – make sure that your answers are direct and to the point.
3. Interrupt the interviewer when he or she is speaking.
4. Provide too much information – keep your answers short and to the point; however, make sure to fully answer the questions. Usually 2-3 minutes maximum for your answers.
5. Bad-mouth former employers.

CASE APPROACH

Case interviews are used by interviewers to measure your ability to deal creatively with complex and ambiguous business problems, as well as how you employ structured thinking to reach logical and intelligent conclusions. Firms want to know how you identify, organize, and approach problems.

The case interview allows the organization to assess your ability to demonstrate five critical skills: use of a framework, problem identification, data analysis, effective communication, and logical process. View the case interview as an opportunity to show off your skills, as they relate to the type of work the firm delivers to clients.

Case Interview Tips:

- Listen to the case example carefully. Take notes if you would prefer. Ask questions. Make sure you answer the question(s) that are being asked. It never hurts to paraphrase the case or questions back to the interviewer to ensure your understanding.
- Set a plan. If you need to take a minute or two to collect your thoughts, do so. You should also think of 3-5 sub-questions that you need to address before you can address the overall problem.
- Create a framework. This will guide you through your thought process and keep you on track. Keep a broad framework.
- Stay organized. When discussing a specific point, keep in mind the reason you are discussing it and how it fits into your initial framework.
- Think out loud. Communicate your train of thought clearly. Even if you have considered

some alternatives that you rejected, tell the interviewer what and why. The interviewer is looking as much for evidence or a logical thought process as for a solution to the case.

- Ask for additional information. The case is meant to be interactive, so feel free to seek out applicable data. Make sure the information is pertinent and the interviewer knows why you might consider the information.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer. Information given by an interviewer during a case might be given to help you.
- It is most important that you demonstrate a logical thought process and structured analytics than to simply arrive at a case solution.
- Use your experience and common sense. Your experience and insight are key items to help you logically navigate your way through the case interview. Be mindful of the resources required for the solution you are suggesting.
- Relax and enjoy. You should think of the interviewer as your partner in this exercise. Pretend this is a real client situation that you need to explore and solve. Use your personal toolkit of experience to help you along the way.

Common Mistakes:

- Not understanding the original question. Heading down the wrong path or deviating from the original question posed by the case.
- Proceeding with the case in a random manner. Failing to identify the major points that need to be addressed, or simply jumping randomly from one issue to another without outlining the approach.
- Asking too many questions. While it is important to ask vital questions to approach the problem, asking superfluous questions without letting the interviewer know the reason for such questions should be avoided.
- Failing to present a clear point of view. While it isn't uncommon to run out of time, make sure to emphasize a point of view based on your ending point.
- Not asking for help. If you get stuck, ask for help. This is an interactive experience, asking for help in tough spots might just get you to a magnificent conclusion.

The case approach may occupy all or part of the interview:

- You may be given a project or problem appropriate to the organization, to be addressed in a set amount of time.
- Or, you may be presented with a list of needs, tasks, or issues and asked which you would act on first, how you would prioritize the rest, and why.
- In general:
 - What are the biggest challenges posed by this project or problem?
 - What steps would you take to begin this project or to address this problem? Describe your plan of attack.
- Outline a presentation to the organization or client.
 - The employer is testing your knowledge, experience, ideas, judgment, your ability to organize your thoughts and think clearly under pressure, your ability to accommodate unfamiliar information and situations, the extent of your analytical and

problem-solving abilities, and whether you can develop and present a good argument and/or plan. Be as specific as possible.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS BY EMPLOYER

Any and all questions that are based on or that attempt to collect information about age, ethnicity/country of origin, gender-related issues, marital status or plans, race, religious background or affiliation, sexual orientation, etc. However, employers do sometimes ask, innocently or not. Think in advance about how to answer in this type of situation. The employer may be trying to determine whether you can work nights and weekends; whether you can travel or relocate. You may choose to reassure the employer that you can balance your personal life and your professional responsibilities. You may volunteer any information you want at any time.

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

Here is a list of general questions that might be useful to ask in an interview.

1. Start **BROAD** – e.g. how is the organization preparing for _____ upcoming change in ____?
2. Impress with **DATA** – e.g. I noticed in your annual report that fundraised income rose by 11 %, and it was through private donations vs. corp sponsorship – can you tell more about that?
3. Focus on the **JOB** – Ask about the team, advancement, training, working across departments, flexibility of the role
4. Get **PERSONAL** – people like to talk about themselves. How did you get to where you are? Why did you choose this org at this point? What have been your personal highlights working here?

Other Sample Questions:

1. How does your work contribute to the mission of this organization?
2. How will my work contribute to your work?
3. Who might comprise my peer group, who would I be primarily working with in your part of the organization or in other parts?
4. What do you deem as successful in this job? How do you see success in this role?
5. What do you think are the qualities that would make someone successful in this role?
6. What is the work environment – culture – pace?
7. What is a typical day?
8. What is the reporting /organizational structure?
9. What do you like about your job? (Interview them - what do they enjoy most)
10. Is this a new position? If not, how long has it existed, and what is the last person who held the job doing now?
11. What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished – short-term and long-term? What would you like to have accomplished within the next two or three months?
12. What do you expect me to accomplish in the first 60 to 90 days?
13. What are the main problems that need immediate attention?
14. What are some of the more difficult problems/challenges facing someone in this position? How do you think these could best be handled?
15. Where could a person go who is successful in this position and within what time frame?
16. How is performance measured against the goals of the department?

17. How is one evaluated? (Performance review process) What accounts for success?
18. What are the most critical factors for success in your business?
19. What are a few things that really drive results for the company/organization?
20. Where do you see the company (or function) going in the next few years?
21. How do you plan to deal with...? (major challenge facing organization/industry)
22. How do you win support from top management?
23. How would you describe your own management style?
24. What are the most important traits which are critical for this position?
25. What are the common attributes of your top performers?
26. How do you prefer your staff to communicate with you?
27. What is the most important contribution that you expect the successful candidate will make during the first six months in this position?
28. For the most part, will I be working independently or as a part of a team?
29. How much autonomy would I have in this position?
30. Does the organization offer any kinds of training programs or other educational opportunities for its staff?

NOTES: (comments, tips, advice from Bloustein alumni and hiring managers)

- Keep the interview interactive – ask your questions throughout the interview if possible rather than waiting till the end.
- Write your questions down. Write down more than you’ll need or be able to ask
- Don’t ask questions that are already on the website
- Ask questions to show how you will contribute to the organization. Bring your skills to the job.

INTERVIEW CLOSING, AFTER THE INTERVIEW & FOLLOW UP

- Before leaving the interview, be sure to advise the interviewer that you are interested in the position and ask what the next step in the process will be. Ask for a business card and be sure to send a thank you note that day.
- Go over your performance and write down important notes about your interview skills and what you might need to improve on. Write down what you have learned about the organization.
- Determine if the job is right for you. Did you like the manager who interviewed you? Do you think the organization’s culture matched what you were looking for? Is this job at a place that you would like to work?
- Next Steps: Don’t wait to see if you got the position. Continue to send out resumes and accept interviews.
- Send a thank you letter to the person(s) with whom you interviewed as soon as possible, but within one week.

SOURCES:

- www.deloitte.com/careers
- <http://www.best-job-interview.com/index.html>
- <http://www.nacweb.org/Home.aspx>