

# Interviewing Techniques in the Private Sector

Sooner or later, your time in graduate school will come to an end, and you'll find yourself in the interview chair. This process is a stressful and unnerving experience for almost everyone, but knowing what to expect will help you navigate it smoothly.

Think of the job interview as a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee. If the interview becomes more conversational, it's usually a good sign, and your anxiety level is probably reduced.

There are several different formats of interviews. The screening interview is usually shorter and might be conducted over the phone, or on campus. Interviews can also be one-on-one, two-on-one, or a panel. You should treat a panel interview as a presentation: if someone asks you a question, direct your response to everyone in the room as best you can. Remember to treat every instance of contact you have with the target company—initial phone calls, sending in materials—as part of the interview.

## How to Prepare

Know yourself. Know your skills and abilities and how to market them effectively. Know the background of the employer, what skill sets they're looking for. Can you anticipate some of the questions that might be asked? Think of how you'll respond.

Talk about how your work, research, or internship experience supports the position. There's a difference between saying you have skills and showing your interviewer that you have them by telling how you've used them in the workplace. Don't sell short your transferable skills, those that are an advantage no matter your field. Qualities like a hard work ethic, an orientation to customer service, and good problem solving-skills are almost universally desired by employers.

Of course, do your research before an interview! Read up on not just the company Web site but their annual report, if applicable. Google articles about them and speak with people who work there. Use the UGA Career Center to get connected with alumni who work there.

Practice being interviewed before the actual date. You can schedule a mock interview at the Career Center, or sign up to use Interview Stream. That's a program that lets you use a Web cam to record your answers to interview questions. Sometimes you need to see a video to get clued in to what you could be doing better.

## What to know about the prospective employers:

- Structure of the organization
- Products made or services provided; research strengths
- Organizational cultural/management style
- Types of people/diversity
- Needs/problems
- History/past performance
- Standing or rank in industry, field or practice
- Political environment within the organization

## Interview Etiquette

Their first impression of you could be a lasting one, and it might be based on something as little as your appearance or handshake. If you lose points on those simple things, you'll be fighting an uphill battle to gain their confidence the rest of the interview.

## Interview DOs:

- Arrive early
- Dress and appear on the conservative and professional side
- Leave your cell phone at home or in the car
- Use a firm handshake
- Make appropriate eye contact
- Be confident but not arrogant
- Balance listening and speaking
- Incorporate your knowledge of the company (For example, if they're telling you about the company at the beginning of the session, think of a question to ask, but make a mental note and save it for the end of the interview. It'll show them you were listening. Don't ask about something you should have already found out by checking their Web site or talking to someone at the company)
- Thank them for the opportunity to interview and show your interest in the position

Interview DON'Ts:

- Look disheveled
- Get distracted/ramble
- Allow for interruptions (cell phone, Blackberry)
- Speak negatively of other students or employers
- Chew gum
- Slouch in your chair
- Speak too casually
- Exaggerate the truth (or lie!)
- Use harsh language
- Interrupt interviewer
- Try to lead the interview
- Ask about money in the first interview
- Discuss personal issues
- Act overly confident or cocky
- Forget to thank them!

Interview Format

- Introductions
- Small talk
- Agenda
- Questions: Know some common questions and have your answers prepared. For example, you should be able to talk about your strengths and weaknesses with ease. Hint: the weakness question can be tough, so a good strategy is to talk about something you used to have trouble with, but then explain what steps you're taking to improve.
- Candidate's questions: Have a solid list prepared. It's okay to ask the same questions of different people.
- Closing: Get the business card of everyone with whom you spoke.
- Send a thank-you note within 24 hours and don't consider the interview complete until this is done. If you're not sure whether to write a card or send an email, do both! Shortly after the interview, jot down some

notes about positive attributes you took away from the meeting, then drop those into the context of the thank-you note. Some of it might feel contrived, but most of it should be relevant to the conversation you had.

The behavioral-based interview evaluates your past performance as it relates to specific skills, with the assumption that it's a good indicator of your future performance. One question you might be asked is something like, "Tell me about a time when you worked together with classmates or coworkers on a project. What role did you play? What were the results?" Here, the employer is looking for an assessment of your team orientation, maturity, interpersonal skills, communication skills, motivation to succeed, ability to collaborate and coordinate with others, persistence/determination to succeed, and accountability for your own actions. Or you might be asked to tell about a time when you were challenged to meet several demands at once. How did you stay on top of everything? In answering this, you should demonstrate your time management and organizational skills as well as your ability to prioritize and multitask.

For these behavioral-based questions, it may help to remember the STAR approach: situation, task, action, result. Describe the situation you were in, the task you had to complete, the action you took, and the result you achieved. ■

*Based on the Graduate School seminar "Interviewing Techniques in the Private Sector" by Scott Williams, Executive Director, UGA Career Center. To view this seminar in its entirety, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.*