



Interviewing and Frequently Asked Questions

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Definition: Meeting of two (or more) face-to-face to discuss employment.

There is no set recipe for a successful interview, but the objectives are:

1. To elaborate resume information
2. To supply info NOT on resume (personality, communication skills, general "fit")
3. To enable you to gain additional info on the employer

Types of Interviews

Screening: This is a general interview aimed at weeding out those students who don't meet the requirements or who don't fit with the organizational culture. Common places screening interviews are held include on-campus interviews and career fairs. The purpose of a screening interview is to eliminate unqualified candidates.

Selection: A selection interview is a longer, more thorough interview geared toward identifying more qualified candidates. It is often an entire day incorporating three to five people. It might even include a dinner the evening before. Most likely this type of interview is held on site including a tour of the facility.

In the Days Before the Interview

Define your criteria

Clearly define your goals before the interview. What can't you live without in a position? Refer to the handout, *The Decision Making Process* for a working grid to help you evaluate each position after the interview. You will also be asked if you have any questions for them. When making your list in advance, make sure to incorporate those questions regarding your criteria. In addition, you'll need to ask about the job, the company and the industry.

- Location (city, suburb, region of country)
- Salary vs. cost-of-living (this information can be found in the Career Services office)
- Travel required
- Benefits (health insurance, vacation, sick days, retirement plan)
- Fit with direct supervisor
- Relocation possibilities
- Distance drive from family
- Small/large staff
- Culture of organization
- Opportunity for advancement
- Training program
- Fit with co-workers
- Office environment (casual, business)

Your Skills vs. Skills They Seek

Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On the left side, make a bulleted list of what the employer is looking for based on the job posting. On the right side, make a bulleted list of the qualities you possess that fit those requirements. Think of concrete examples that you could use in the interview to demonstrate those skills that you possess. Refer to the handouts; *Liberal Arts Skills* and *Top Skills Employers Seek* to get an idea of the kinds of skills you might want to highlight.

Know The Organization

Research the company, the industry and the competition. Most company information can be found using the Internet. If you cannot find the company on the World Wide Web, see if the Career Resource Center has any information. You may also call the company directly and request some company literature be sent to you. When conducting your research focus on locating the following information.

- The function and size of the organization
- The potential for expansion or growth
- The products or services provided
- Typical salary ranges for your desired position
- Geographical locations
- Research or practical emphasis
- Career advancement possibilities
- Opportunities for training or further education
- Stability of the financial condition or backing

Practice, Practice, Practice

Refer to the handout, *Frequently Asked Interview Questions*, and practice your answers to a variety of questions. Begin by preparing your 60-second personal statement: Your answer to the, "Tell me about yourself," question. Write at least five success stories to answer behavioral interview questions ("Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of a time...").

When responding to questions, answer as directly and honestly as possible. Don't tell the employer what you think he wants to hear. Instead, think back to your preparation and use answers that sell your skills. The most important thing is to **be yourself** and focus on positive qualities. Never apologize for your lack of anything. Another important point is to be sure that for every answer you give, you back up everything you say with examples.

If you talk quickly, count to 3 before answering questions right away. Take a couple seconds to think about what you are going to say so your response is accurate and appropriate. You don't want your answers to sound canned, instead you need to sound thoughtful.

If you are still feeling uneasy about your interviewing abilities, schedule a Mock Interview with a career counselor.

Other items to keep in mind

Research salary data and determine your worth. Determine your salary needs based on your living expenses — what is your bottom line?

Get permission from your references to use their names.

Before You Go to the Interview

What To Wear

SUIT, SUIT, SUIT! Employers can assume this is the best you'll ever look. You may be inclined to buy a fun trendy suit, REFRAIN. The more conservative and classic, the better. For more detailed information, refer to the handout *Dress For Success*. Two tips: men- no white sports socks and women- lay off the perfume. Smell good, clean. Your scent should leave the room when you do.

Carry these items to the interview:

- Several copies of your resume on quality paper.
- A copy of your references.
- A pad of paper on which to take notes (notes are optional). To look even more professional, invest in a leather portfolio with the Marquette University logo on the front. Keep your questions, paper for notes, and a nice pen inside.
- Directions to the interview site.

Upon Arrival

- Arrive early — enter the building 10 minutes before your appointment.
- Treat receptionist with respect. If she is not formally part of the search committee, you can bet she is informally.
- Smile and greet everyone with a firm handshake. Make eye contact and use names when introduced.
- Review your prepared stories and answers.
- Go to the restroom and check your appearance one last time.
- Announce yourself to the receptionist in a professional manner.
- Stand and greet your interviewer with a hearty — not bone-crushing — handshake.
- Smile and look into the interviewer's eyes.

During the Interview

- Try to focus on the points you have prepared without sounding rehearsed or stiff.
- Relax and enjoy the conversation. Learn what you can about the company.
- Ask questions and listen; read between the lines.
- At the conclusion, thank the interviewer and determine the next steps.
- Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can send a follow-up letter.

After the Interview

- As soon as possible, write down what you are thinking and feeling.
- Later in the day, look at what you wrote and assess how you did.
- Write a follow-up thank-you letter, reminding the interviewer of your qualities- maybe something that you forgot to say in the interview.

Answering Frequently Asked Questions

Interviews are one of the most nerve-racking experiences you will have to go through in your job search. The secret to interviewing is to practice. The more you practice the easier interviewing will become.

While all jobs and all interviewers are not the same, there are certain questions that are usually asked of candidates during an interview. These questions fall into two categories: “the getting to know you” questions and “the why do you want this job” questions. Also, even though companies are looking for different things, most employers look for candidates with the following characteristics:

1. Communication skills (verbal/written)
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Teamwork skills (works well with others)
4. Motivated/ willing to take initiative
5. Strong work ethic
6. Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
7. Analytical skills
8. Flexibility/adaptability
9. Computer skills
10. Self-confidence
11. Leadership skills
12. Organization skills
13. Detail oriented
14. Friendly/outgoing personality
15. Tactful
16. Well mannered/polite
17. Creative
18. Entrepreneurial skills/risk taker
19. Possessing a sense of humor

Behavioral Based Interviewing

Behavioral based interviewers believe that past behavior is an accurate predictor of future behavior. They concentrate many of their questions on situations that candidates have encountered in the past. What they want to hear is an illustration of your behavior. Typical questions focus on understanding a specific situation or challenge that you have faced that will demonstrate a particular quality or skill that is relevant to the position. To maximize the effectiveness of your answers, try using the STAR system.

S = Describe a situation.

T = Talk about the task.

A = Explain the action you took.

R = Talk about the positive results, quantifying if possible.

Common Questions You Could Be Asked

* Indicates a behavioral question

Education

How and why did you select Marquette University?

The important section of this question is in the word ‘how’. The manner in which you make large decisions is vital information for an interviewer, who believes that you probably will be quite consistent in your decision-making mode.

What led you to this major and what courses did you like most/least?

Let the love of your favorite subject matter show! If your major or classes that you enjoyed the most do not seem to have a direct connection to the position you are interviewing for, concentrate on the skills that these classes developed. If the main reason that you didn’t like coursework was the professor, the interviewer will wonder about your ability to be productive in the occasional difficult work situations that are common to any professional position.

How has your education prepared you for this job? In which respects are you best prepared or most knowledgeable?

Your education has given you much. Be prepared to discuss three areas – theory/facts via coursework, hands-on experience (labs, internships, projects, co-ops) and the total experience of an MU education (include your major, the core curriculum and your volunteer activities).

What is your GPA and how does it reflect your academic abilities?

All employers wonder if you are mature, if you will be a hard worker or if you will prefer to do the minimum that is required. This question is a test of those qualities. What is your maturity level? How would you describe your work ethic? If your GPA is low, be prepared to talk about it. Hopefully, it will have been rising each semester and will be highest in your major.

What honors or awards have you received?

Skills/Achievements

Tell me about yourself.

How would you describe yourself?

How would others describe you?

Do not get rattled by this question, and do not go into your life story. These questions are meant to probe not only your ability to do the job but also your preparation for the interview. Your preparation (or lack of it) will be immediately showcased. Have you thought about and are you able to give illustrations of your skills, knowledge bases and traits that match the position? Think of the qualities that employers look for: Do you have an example of how you demonstrated some of these qualities? If you do, then state that. If that doesn't work for you, then qualify the question. Ask "What area of my background would be most relevant to you?" and take it from there.

Why should I hire you? This is where you should really sell yourself. Highlight areas from your background that relate to the company's needs. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, matching it with your skills.

What are your skills or strengths? Share a short list of 3-5 transferable skills (not personality traits) that are critical to performing this position well. A good way to assess which skills are most important is to study the job description and the ad. Usually the responsibilities are listed in order of importance and require specific skills to perform them well. Then design at least one story in STAR format (situation, action, result) that will illustrate this strength. Isolate high points in your background. Always back your answers with specific examples. You do have at least three strengths. Your biggest mistake here is to sell yourself short!

How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you? Of course, be honest. Think about any compliments you have gotten on projects or activities. Don't just tell characteristics, but include examples of why friends or professors would describe you that way.

In what areas do you need to improve?

What do you consider your biggest weakness?

Everyone has weaknesses, but a careless answer can virtually end your consideration as a candidate, so prepare this answer thoughtfully before you arrive. The interviewer is trying to find out 1) are you aware of your weaknesses, 2) have you thought about how you might improve, and 3) are your weak points going to jeopardize how you perform? There are three ways to approach this question. If there is a minor part of the job about which you lack knowledge but will gain it quickly, use that. Be careful using this one. Put the weakness in the past. You had it once, but now you are over it. Design the answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive. This one is your best move.

What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?*

***What is the toughest challenge you have faced?** Why?**

In your story, include the skills, traits and knowledges that aided in this achievement. Use the STAR system and be certain to end with positive results. Make sure you are proud of something you accomplished rather than being proud of someone or something else of which you had no contribution.

As we make our decision about your fit for this position, what do you want us to remember about you?

These are typical wrap-up questions at the end of an interview. Always be ready to give a summary of your qualifications in 2-3 sentences. This could be your skills, personal traits, work ethic, or passion for the career. Make the answer short and spirited.

Can you work under pressure?*

Don't just give a yes or no answer; elaborate. Explain why. Give an example of a time when you felt that you were working under pressure. Talk about how you successfully dealt with the pressure.

Work Experience/Environment

Tell me about the position that has given you the most satisfaction. *

Talk about the most career-related position you can. If you really loved organizing the last homecoming as a student leader, talk about that experience and the skills you used, relating it to your current field. If you loved planting flowers for your grandmother and you're seeking an accounting position, the employer may wonder why you're not pursuing a career as a green thumb.

What have you learned from your work / internship / co-op experiences ?*

How have your extracurricular activities provided experience applicable to the workplace?* All of your life experiences are connected in some way. What skills, traits and work habits have you utilized and strengthened? Ideas for illustrations: positions of leadership, being an active responsible member, adding quality, or designing new programs.

Tell me about your favorite supervisor – your least favorite supervisor.

Describe what you think would be an ideal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate.

What qualities does a successful manager possess?

In order to assign you to an appropriate manager or section of the company for a second interview, the interviewer needs to know how you want to be supervised. He/she also wants to know what management styles displease you. This is a time for being able to succinctly describe the qualities and attitudes that you would desire in a supervisor. This is not a time for character assassination. Employers are looking for someone who, if there is a problem, will handle the situation maturely. Answer thinking of what you envision as being the relationship between supervisor/supervisee. Don't just make it up. Think about why you would want a supervisor to be supportive or hands-off or a mentor or give autonomy, etc. Be realistic in thinking about whether or not your potential supervisor is asking the question and what his or her style seems to be now. This is a good question to ask of him or her, too.

Tell me about a time: *

When you had a major problem and explain how you dealt with it.

A good follow up question to this might be How would you handle the same situation differently now?

When you made a poor decision and how you corrected it.

When you had to adapt to a difficult work situation.

When you worked with someone you disliked and how you handled the situation.

Describe these events as non-judgmentally as possible. Explain difficult situations using facts (not emotions) and be as succinct as possible. Discuss the event in a professional manner and even though the result may not have been ideal, remember to also share what you learned. Possible examples: Differences in work habits, work values, or ethical attitudes.

In what type of work environment are you most comfortable?

How do you work under pressure?*

Why have you left your positions?

Will you be willing to relocate? Do you have a geographical preference or limitation? How much are you willing to travel?

Tell the truth. State amount of travel in terms of annual percentage. If you are willing to relocate, know what locations the company presently has and refer to them. You may need to ask questions about what type, how much, and to where you would be relocating or traveling. Be as flexible as you can. Remember, though, if you aren't willing to do this, don't accept the position if offered. A bad "fit" is the number one reason for leaving a position.

Traits/Values/Beliefs

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

Is it financial reward, work environment, the supervisor, helping others, variety, challenge, etc.? Employers want to assess this area because they know what factors they can and cannot provide.

How do you determine and evaluate success? Do you have standards? What are they? What does quality mean to you? How will you know whether or not you are successful? How much do you depend on other people's feedback?

What are your salary expectations?

Until you are offered a position, this question should not be answered. Right now you are searching for a position and a company that are a good match. If you share your ideas, and your expectations are significantly different than theirs (whether low or high), you may no longer be a candidate. If you both come to the conclusion that this could be an excellent situation, then you must be ready to discuss this subject. Before your first interview, conduct research on salaries in the industry, in this type of position, and in the geographical area. What is fair for you in terms of a total package? What do you need vs. what might you desire? Remember to assess benefits as well as the salary.

What two or three things are most important to you in your work?

Be honest here, too. But also be professional and career-oriented. Talk in terms of values such as: helping others, interacting with many different people, making tough decisions, having a variety of responsibilities, having the opportunity for advancement, being recognized for your contributions, making a difference in peoples' lives, etc. Stay away from those more egocentric reasons such as pays well, great vacation and benefits package, fun social atmosphere, easy commute, cool uniform.

Career Plans and Goals

Why did you choose this particular career field?

What are your long and short-range goals and objectives?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

These questions are designed to find out 1) if you set goals, 2) if your goals are related to your profession or industry, and 3) if you have goals of pursuing excellence. People want to hire someone who is self-motivated, who wants to improve, and who has taken the time to establish a vision beyond today. An exact career goal is not necessary nor is a plan that stretches far into the future.

How do you balance the needs of work and school with your personal life?

This is a time to discuss what balance means to you and how you achieve it. Employers are concerned about your physical, mental and emotional health because they believe a well-balanced employee will be productive. You may wish to talk about a few of your activities that you believe promote your well-being. Personal relationships are not of interest to the employer.

Specific to Organization

Why are you seeking a position with our company?

Tell me what you know about our organization.

This is a test! Do you want to work here enough to have done your homework? It is assumed that, as a college student, you have the abilities to learn and to research. Now this company wants to know if you were motivated enough to have utilized these skills in learning about them. Know the company's mission, its competencies and goals so that you can relate honestly to the issues that they believe are important. This question is one of the most important ones that interviewers ask. Interviewers want to know if you care about this company and what it does.

In what ways do you think you can contribute to our organization?