**Job Interview**

All interview questions are related to four key issues:

1. **Why are you here**?  What brings you to our company?  i.e.  What do you know about this organization?
2. **What kind of person are you?** i.e.  What are your goals, values, personality traits?
3. **What can you do for our company?**  What can you do for me? i.e. What are your skills, special knowledge and aspirations?
4. **How much are you going to cost?** i.e. What are your salary expectations? What will you cost in training? etc.

Prepare answers in those four areas, plus:

* “Do you have any questions?”

**Interview Preparation**

**RESEARCH: Know Yourself**

Know your abilities, interests, skills, experience and personality.  Be aware of your strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas.

Think about short stories from work, school and volunteer experiences that you can tell to illustrate your skills in a variety of areas.  Each story should be about 3 - 4 sentences in length and tell something about you that is of value to the interviewer.

**TIPS**

* What have I gained from past work experiences, academic programs and other activities?
* What are my strong and weak points?
* What are my short term and long term career goals?
* What do I have to offer the employer?
* What kind of supervisor do I like and why?
* Use relevant stories to illustrate your answers.
* Book a career assessment to determine your skills and interests and how they relate to the world of work.
* Ask friends and family members to help identify your top strengths and challenges.

**RESEARCH: The Job**

Know about the job you're applying for. This includes the specific job, and generally about the industry and field.

**TIPS**

* Understand the job posting.
* Check if your interests and abilities compare to the requirements of the position.
* Read articles written by people who are in the field.
* Inform yourself about future trends in the industry.
* Find out the average income earned by people in the occupation.
* Conduct informational interviews – talk to people in the field and those who do the job to get the scoop.
* Search through the National Occupational Classification Index for main duties, educational requirements and occupations classified similarly.
* Talk to friends and relatives.

**RESEARCH: The Organization**

It’s easier to convince an employer that you would be of benefit to the organization if you are knowledgeable about it.  Also, researching an organization can help you decide whether you want to work there.

**TIPS**

* How old is the organization, and what is its history of development?
* What are its products or services?
* If the organization sells, what are its markets? Retailers? Wholesalers?
* Is it a public or non-profit organization? What purpose does it serve? How is it funded? Whom does it serve? What functions does it perform?
* How does this organization rank in the industry?
* What is the financial status of the company? Last year’s sales? Growth record?
* Are there any plans for expansion?
* What is the organizational structure?
* What problems does the organization need to overcome? (By identifying the problems that the organization faces, you can match your abilities to these ends during the interview.)
* Where to look online: the Organization's website, annual reports, newsgroups, professional associations, newspaper articles, local Chamber of Commerce.
* Who to talk to: attend Career Nights, information sessions and job fairs to speak to people currently working in the organization.

**Practice and Evaluation**

Review and practice sample interview questions to increase your confidence level and competence in answering effectively.  Following each interview, evaluate what went well and how you may be able to improve – this is a very useful strategy in preparing for subsequent interviews.

**TIPS**

* Practice answering out loud. It will help you master your answer better than just thinking about how you would answer.
* Schedule a mock interview with Career Services!

**Answering Behaviour Questions**

Questions that start with "Tell me about a time when..." are popular because they show how you've handled difficult situations in the past - which is a good indicator of how you will deal with similar situations in the future.

Spend time thinking about your strengths, skills and stories that would illustrate these skills to an employer. Your research on the employer/occupation will tell you the skills required for a particular job.  Be specific.

All good stories have a beginning (setting up the situation/task), a middle (where the action takes place) and an end (the result or relevance of your behaviour).  Remember, you want to discuss what you did or accomplished in the story.

**Some Typical Behaviour-Based Questions:**

* Describe your most disappointing and frustrating experience in gaining the support of others for an idea or proposal.
* Tell me about a time when you had to work hard in order to fully understand what another person was saying to you.
* Describe the last time you did something at school/work that went well beyond expectations.
* Give me an example of a time in which you felt you were able to motivate your co-workers in school/work.
* Tell me about a time when you dealt effectively with conflict.
* Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation that you have completed

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| **The STAR Technique for Answering Behaviour Questions** |
| Image of a star | **S - SituationT - TaskA - ActionR – Result** |

This technique will ensure you answer all aspects of the question you've been asked.

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| **Interview Question**: Tell me about a time when you had to explain detailed information to someone. |

**STEP 1** - Think of a story you can tell to illustrate the example.

**STEP 2** - Start by describing the situation and the task you were assigned [Situation and Task]

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| **Situation/Task** – Working in Laboratory Services at the University of Guelph, there were often visiting researchers who needed to have detailed protocols explained before they were allowed into the labs. In the past, the researchers were given a 10-minute tour. |

**STEP 3** - Talk about the action you took that illustrates the skill you've been asked about [Action]

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| **Action** – To ensure consistency, I developed a comprehensive one-page document that was reviewed with each researcher in addition to the tour. They had to read and sign the document before being allowed into the labs. |

**STEP 4** - Explain how it turned out [Result]

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| **Result** – Since implementing the system the protocols the information that needed to be communicated was always available, and we thereby decreased safety violations by 20%. As well, the system was made more efficient because now anyone working in the lab can administer the procedure to visiting researchers. |

 **STEP 5** - Describe what your story illustrated and how it relates to the job [Relevance]

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| **Relevance** – I found a way to ensure detailed information was more clearly understood, and lab safety was increased. If I am the successful candidate, I would assess current communication procedures to determine if more efficient methods could be implemented. |
| * Think about stories that illustrate your competence and skill.
* Don’t try to “wing it” during the interview, be prepared with examples.
* Be specific and use STARR.
* Don’t give the employer a “I usually ...” answer.  Give them a specific example of a situation where you can demonstrate the skill.
* Talk about your role in the story – what action did YOU take.  The story should focus around you – not your supervisor or co-workers.

**Frequent 10 Interview Questions and How You Should Answer Them** |
| As the saying goes, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". So here is a valuable insight into the world of interview questions and the techniques best used to answer them. |
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| There are some questions that are asked frequently in interviews and you should prepare your answers beforehand. The key things to remember when responding to interview questions are to keep your answers relevant, brief and to the point. If you are faced with a difficult question, make sure you stay calm, don't get defensive, and take a moment to think about your response before you answer. |
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| Remember, these responses are only suggestions. Try to personalize your response as much as possible. |
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| **Questions:**  |
| Q1: Tell me about yourself.  |
| A: Identify some of your main attributes and memorize them. Describe your qualifications, career history and range of skills, emphasizing those skills relevant to the job on offer. |
| Q2: What have your achievements been to date? |
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| A: Select an achievement that is work-related and fairly recent. Identify the skills you used in the achievement and quantify the benefit it had to the company. For example, 'my greatest achievement has been to design and implement a new sales ledger system, bringing it in ahead of time and improving our debtors' position significantly, saving the company $50,000 per month in interest'. |
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| Q3: Give an example of when you have worked under pressure. |
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| A: An employer is interested in your experience and reaction to an event or situation that you worked under pressure. You may choose an actual event at work or a personal event that showcased a positive result in lieu of a stressful situation. For example, despite lacking 20% of the work force and being behind schedule by 2 hours due to product logistics delays, I was able to partner with another department to obtain additional technical support workers to needed to upgrade our company’s computer network and have our customer service team operational by the start of the day. |
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| Q4: What is the most difficult situation you have had to face and how did you tackle it? |
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| A: The purpose of this question is to find out what your definition of difficult is and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving. In order to show yourself in a positive light, select a difficult work situation which was not caused by you and which can be quickly explained in a few sentences. Explain how you defined the problem, what the options were, why you selected the one you did and what the outcome was. Always end on a positive note. |
| Q5: What do you like about your present job? |
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| A: This is a straightforward question. All you have to do is make sure that your 'likes' correspond to the skills etc. required in the job on offer. Be enthusiastic; describe your job as interesting and diverse but do not overdo it - after all, you are looking to leave. |
| Q6: What do you dislike about your present job? |
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| A: Be cautious with this answer. Do not be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses that will leave you open to further problems. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company, such as its size or slow decision-making processes etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride as part of the job. |
| Q7: What are your strengths? |
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| A: This is one question that you know you are going to get so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four proficiencies e.g. your ability to learn quickly, determination to succeed, positive attitude, your ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. You may be asked to give examples of the above so be prepared. |
| Q8: What is your greatest weakness? |
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| A: Do not say you have none - this will lead to further problems. You have two options - use a professed weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part in an area that is not vital for the job. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered to be a strength, and the steps you have taken to combat it. An example would be, 'I know my team thinks I'm too demanding at times - I tend to drive them pretty hard but I'm getting much better at using the carrot and not the stick'. |
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| Q9: Why do you want to leave your current employer? |
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| A: State how you are looking for a new challenge, more responsibility, experience and a change of environment. Do not be negative in your reasons for leaving. It is rarely appropriate to cite salary as your primary motivator. |
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| Q10: Why have you applied for this particular job? |
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| A: The employer is looking for evidence that the job suits you, fits in with your general aptitudes, coincides with your long-term goals and involves doing things you enjoy. Make sure you have a good understanding of the role and the organization, and describe the attributes of the organization that interest you most. |

**Questions YOU Can Ask the Employer**

Take a moment to look at the questions below. Re-write them in your own words so you can ask them in interviews.

**TIP:** Never, ever ask about money or benefits in the initial interview. It’s important to focus questions on the interviewer, then the company, and finally on you.

Connect with the Interviewer

* How did you join the company? What makes you stay?
* What has this company taught you?

Learn about the work environment

* What makes the department I’d be working in successful?
* I’ve done my homework on the company, but I’d love to hear you describe the corporate culture here in your own words?
* What makes this a great place to work? And since no company is perfect, what could be improved upon?
* What traits do you feel a person needs to be successful at this company?
* Can you give me an example of a recent hire that has been successful?
* How does the company measure its success? What evaluation criterion do they use?
* What are the three greatest strengths of this company? What are the three greatest strengths of the department I’d be working in?
* What are the three biggest challenges the company faces this year? And for the department I’d be working for?

Ask for feedback

* What are the next steps in the hiring process?

**Interview Appearance and Attire**

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| In an interview your attire plays a supporting role. Appropriate attire supports your image as a person who takes the interview process seriously and understands the nature of the industry in which you are trying to become employed. Be aware that in some industries, customer contact and image presented to the customer is critical. In such industries, your attire will be judged more critically.**General interview attire guidelines for men and women** |

* A two-piece matched suit is always the best and safest choice.
* What if the job is in a NON-SUIT wearing work environment?Dressing well is a compliment to the person(s) with whom you meet. If you think the industry in which you're interviewing would frown on a suit, or the interview will involve going to a work site where a suit would be inappropriate, look for advice through professional organizations, your professors who have been employed in that industry, and/or by asking the employer directly and politely. One alternative is to wear pressed pants (like khakis) and a dark jacket; less formal than a suit, but still business-appropriate for both men and women.
* Conservative colors/fabric: Navy, dark gray, and black are safe coloursOther color trends may come and go; avoid the extremes. Solids or very subtle weave patterns or plaids (the type that look solid across a room) are safest. Wool, wool blends, or other good quality natural and synthetic fibers, are generally the best fabrics in all seasons. Avoid lower quality acetate / rayon blends.
* Cost/quality: You are not expected to be able to afford the same clothing as a corporate CEO. Do invest in quality that will look appropriate during your first two or three years on the job. One good-quality suit is sufficient for a job search if that is all your budget allows. You can vary your shirt/blouse and tie/accessories.