

# INTERVIEWING BASICS



You created a resume and cover letter and targeted employers. Now, you've been invited for an interview. What's next? Here are the basics to interviewing success.

## Dressing for the Interview

The first thing an employer will notice upon meeting you is the way you present yourself. Though organization culture can vary, the importance of professional attire cannot be overstated. By dressing appropriately, you demonstrate not only respect for the interviewer, but a larger understanding of professional etiquette. Though you should ultimately be evaluated and hired based on your skills and abilities, the image you project during the interview will certainly be taken into consideration. In general, it is a good idea to dress fairly conservatively for an interview. Here are some simple guidelines to keep in mind:

- Classic suits in darker colors are best for conservative industries. More creative industries may allow a little more flexibility. Stay away from anything that could distract the interviewer.
- Women, wear a closed-toe pump with a 1 or 2 inch heel and the conservative approach recommends that you wear hose, even with a pantsuit.
- Avoid flashy attire, hairstyles, and accessories in any interview. Hair, make-up and jewelry should be classic and understated.
- Hair should not be distracting to an interviewer. Your hair should be away from your face and not in your eyes, played with, or constantly hand-groomed during an interview. If your hair is long and would cause any of these problems, either pull it back, put it up, or cut it.
- If you do have a beard or mustache, make sure it is well-trimmed. Goatees, "5 day stubble" and long sideburns are considered trendy and are not appropriate for most professional interviewing situations.
- Perfumes and colognes can be distracting, so play it safe and avoid wearing them.
- If you need help with interview related expenses such as attire and/or travel you may be eligible for assistance through the "Styled for Success Stipend." To qualify for the stipend you must be a second semester junior or a senior and receiving financial aid. For more information please contact Jacquelyn Gist at [jmgist@email.unc.edu](mailto:jmgist@email.unc.edu)

## Materials to Take On the Interview

You will need a leather folder style portfolio containing pockets (for extra copies of your resume, references, unofficial or official transcript, and writing sample if necessary), a notepad and pen.

## Non-Verbal Messages

Much of how and what we communicate is done through non-verbal communication. According to some studies, as much as 90% of our communication is done through body language. This is especially true during a job interview. You need to be aware of the messages you are conveying both verbally and non-verbally. It is important that you create a positive impression non-verbally.

- If the interview is off campus, do a “dry run” of locating the interview. Arrive to the interview early and walk around the block. This will relieve stress and help you to perform optimally.
- Make sure you have a firm handshake (no limp wrist handshakes) and look the employer in the eye.
- Maintaining good eye contact with the employer shows that you are present and engaged in the interview.
- Your body language during the interview should convey a sense of positive energy and engagement. Sit up straight with legs crossed or feet firmly on the floor. Your back should be straight, head up and looking forward. Refrain from slouching, appearing too relaxed, or excessive fidgeting.
- Smile! There is no overstating the positive impact a simple smile can have during the interview. While you want to come across as serious and professional, you also want to remain friendly and likeable. Don't be afraid to show your interpersonal skills and natural warmth during the interview.
- Practice controlling nervous ticks (twirling hair, tapping foot) and “talking” hands to ensure they enhance your image and don't detract from it. Also keep in mind that chewing gum is never appropriate in a professional setting.

## **Introductions**

- If a recruiter mispronounces your name, politely and clearly say, "I'm sorry, my name is ....". Smile and don't make a big deal of the mistake.
- With introductions, always err on the conservative side and use Mr. or Ms., until the interviewer tells you to do otherwise. Don't be too casual; always maintain a level of respect. If you have any doubt on this issue, use the more formal approach.
- When shaking hands with employers, you may extend your hand as soon as eye contact is made and the introduction begins.
- If you draw a blank on someone's name, take the embarrassment on yourself by saying, "I'm sorry, I know we've met, your name is...?".

## **What Do Employers Look For During the Interview?**

Employers typically want to know three things:

- Can you do the job?
- Will you do the job?
- Will you fit in with the organization?

Your job is to provide enough solid information to answer an unequivocal “YES!” to all three of these questions. To do so effectively, you will need to be aware of the specific characteristics employers seek in new hires. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), who surveys hundreds of employers each year, the attributes most highly sought after are:

1. Communication skills
2. Honesty/integrity
3. Interpersonal/ teamwork skills
4. Motivation/initiative
5. Strong work ethic

### **What Should You Look For During the Interview?**

Just as employers interview you to see if you are a fit, you are interviewing them as well. By being attentive and thoughtful, you can learn important things about an organization during the interview. Some things you may want to consider include:

- How does the organization's mission match with your interests?
- Does the nature of the job sound interesting?
- How is the organization run; does it seem well-organized?
- How do the other employees interact with each other?
- Are you excited about the possibility of this position?
- Does the job match your career interests?

### **Preparing for Your Interview**

#### **STEP 1: RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER AND FIELD**

One of the most important aspects of the interview practice occurs before you ever even speak to the employer. Conducting research on prospective employers is essential to a successful interview. So, what things should you know about an employer before the interview? Simply put: as much as possible.

You should be knowledgeable about the organization's mission, history, growth, products, competitors, locations, etc. Obviously, visiting the employer's website is the easiest place to start. UCS has hundreds of print and electronic resources, including the Career Insider by Vault (available through the UCS "Resources" page) which can provide you with much of the information you will need on an employer, career field, or industry. Employers want to hire candidates that can demonstrate a solid knowledge and genuine interest in their organizations.

#### **STEP 2: KNOW YOURSELF**

In addition to conducting employer research, it is also important that you are able to adequately communicate your skills, interests, and goals during the interview, and match them to the position you are pursuing. Keep in mind that anything and everything on your resume is fair game for the employer to ask about. Carefully review your resume and make sure that you can speak in detail about everything on it.

#### **STEP 3: PRACTICE**

Even if you feel you have excellent communication skills, nothing can help you prepare more than practicing interview questions. In addition to UCS' interactive, online practice tool-InterviewStream, UCS counselors are also available to conduct practice interviews. These mock interviews can even be recorded so that you can see and hear exactly what the employer would observe. We highly recommend that you consider taking advantage of these resources.

### **Questions to Ask**

- Interviewers appreciate and expect questions, and the questions should never seem as if they are being read (See a list of questions below). The key is to show you have done your research and are interested in the company and the position.

- You never ask the employer about salary. Your research of the industry should give you an idea of what the position will pay. The interviewer is responsible for initiating negotiations on salary and may not mention salary at all during a first interview or until a job offer is made.

What do you think are the greatest challenges associated with this position?

How would you describe the organization's culture?

What would be a typical career path for someone in this position?

How is performance evaluated?

What do you look for in an ideal candidate?

How is the training/rotation handled?

What is the next step in the process?

What is the percentage of teamwork to individual work?

What do you like best about working here?

## Follow Up

- To find out an employer's deadline for making a hiring decision, be sure, at the end of the final interview, to ask the employer if he or she has a date in mind for making his or her final decision. Having a specific time frame will help you in your follow-up.
- Always send a thank you note to the employer within 24 hours of the interview. Thank you's written after a job interview could be emailed, typed on business-sized paper and mailed, or, if you have legible handwriting, you could write a thank you note on heavy card stock and mail it. If the employer initially contacted you by email to schedule the interview, it is perfectly acceptable to send the thank you note via email. You may also want to follow up with a hard copy of your thank you.
- If you met with more than one person on the interview, it is not necessary that you send each person a thank you letter. You can if you wish, or you can send one thank you to the person who arranged the interviews and have them thank all the interviewers and list the interviewers by name. (In order to spell their names correctly, request business cards at the interview).
- If you are made an offer of employment, ask the employer at the time the offer is made, how much time you have to give an answer, if they have not already told you. Make your decision within that time frame. If you need an extension, let the employer know. Your reason for this request should be a good one. The employer is under no obligation to accept your request. You do not get what you don't ask for, so be polite and act professionally in making any requests of the employer.