AGJR 481: Senior Seminar
Interviewing Techniques

The purpose of an interview between a candidate and a prospective employer is to exchange information. Candidates have particular knowledge, skills, and abilities to offer and prospective employers want to purchase certain knowledge, skills, and abilities that will fit their needs. Candidates and employers must be certain that the match is correct.

There are four phases to an interview:

1. **Introduction.** During this first phase of the interview, both the candidate and employer are establishing first impressions and making personal introductions, and establishing rapport.

2. **Background and Probe Stage.** The prospective employer will ask the candidate about educational background and work experience. The employer will discuss skills and abilities in more detail, relative to the employer’s needs. This is the questioning period.

3. **Matching Stage/ Turn the Tables.** This is the candidate’s chance to highlight personal qualifications and strengths to show a good match between position and candidate. Be prepared to ask questions.

4. **Final Questions and Closure.** The end of the interview is usually accentuated with philosophical or long range questions. Then the interviewer begins the standard ‘close’ that brings the whole process to an end.

There are two major categories of interviews:

1. **Screening** -- Decision whether the applicant is “in or out.”

2. **Selection** -- Decision whether to hire an applicant. Employers are interested in:
   - Are you able to do the tasks required for this position?
   - Are you willing and motivated to solve the employer’s problems?
   - Are you going to fit in? Are they comfortable in seeing you every day?

**Typical Interview Styles/Questions** - Employers may use behavioral or traditional interviewing styles.

**Behavioral Style Interview Questions**
These questions always seek to identify past experiences. To determine which questions to ask, the recruiter first identifies those skills and abilities needed to perform the job successfully. The philosophy behind this style of interview is that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance. This has become a very popular and widely used interview style. Expect more employers to use this interview style.

To prepare for a behavioral interview, evaluate the position. List the skills and abilities needed for the job. Select the five most important skills and abilities. Then, think of three examples that show how you have used each of those five skills or abilities well. For each example, provide a description of the situation, the people involved, tell what happened, and explain the result. That means that you should have 15 ‘short stories’ about how you have used your special skills. At the same time, think of one example when you didn’t use those skills well. That is five more stories. Take time to determine what you learned about yourself from that negative experience. Well-trained employers will look for these negative experiences, or what they call ‘contrary evidence,’ to create a balanced picture of a candidate.

1. What is your philosophy on life?
2. Give me an example when you…
3. Describe an incident where you went over and beyond the call of duty…
4. Tell me about the time you reached out for additional responsibility…
5. Tell me about the largest project you worked on…

**Traditional Style Interview Questions**
Employers who are not using the behavioral style interview process generally use the traditional style. The recruiter will ask about your educational background, past work experience, extra-curricular activities, and outside interests and activities.

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1 Note. Adapted from: [http://www.careerservices.ius.edu/tips/interviews/interviewprep.html](http://www.careerservices.ius.edu/tips/interviews/interviewprep.html)  
[http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/inttech.htm](http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/inttech.htm) and  
Almost all interview questions asked in the traditional style can be boiled down to their bare essence. When that is done, most questions give the recruiter in depth information about 1) CAN you do the job? 2) WILL you do the job? and 3) Do you FIT into my organization? A list of CAN, WILL, and FIT questions follows. It would be wise to write out your responses to these questions prior to an interview.

**CAN type questions:**
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How has your education prepared you for a career?
- Why should I hire you?
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in your job?
- What relationship should exist between a supervisor and a subordinate?
- Describe your most rewarding educational experience.
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your field of major study?
- What college subjects did you like best? Why?
- What college subjects did you like least? Why?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently and why?
- What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?

**WILL type questions:**
- What are your long-range (5, 10, 15 years) and short-range (1-4 years) goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these and how are you preparing to achieve them?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an employment situation like ours?
- What contributions can you make to our operation?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?

**FIT type questions:**
- Why did you choose your career?
- Which is more important to you: money or type of job?
- How would you describe yourself? How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- If you were hiring someone for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with us?
- What do you know about our company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you? Are you willing to travel?

**Questions to Ask the Employer**
During the interview, the employer may ask if YOU have any questions. You must be prepared to ask questions. Always go to the interview with at least five questions. When you have no questions to ask, you appear to have little interest in the position or the employer. This list may give you ideas of questions to ask.

1. What are the opportunities for personal growth?
2. What is the realistic time frame for advancement?
3. How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
4. How long do people usually spend in this position?
5. Describe the typical first-year on the job.
6. What training programs are available?
7. What are the challenging facets of the job?
8. What are the company’s plans for future growth?
9. What are the company’s strengths and weaknesses?
10. Why do you enjoy working for your firm?

15 Sure Ways to Blow an Interview
1. Know little or nothing about the employer.
2. Have a negative attitude.
3. Have poor communication skills.
4. Use rambling answers that don’t address the question.
5. Display inappropriate behavior (e.g., smoking, chewing gum, tapping your foot).
6. Fail to make eye contact.
7. Fail to ask questions.
8. Dress inappropriately.
9. Be passive; don’t sell yourself.
10. Show up late to the interview.
11. Lack proper career planning; have ill-defined goals and purposes.
12. Appear bored with the organization or the industry.
13. Show no enthusiasm and be indifferent.
14. Be overbearing, over aggressive or conceited.
15. Be interested only in the best dollar offer.

Recruiter Evaluation Form
Many employers use a candidate evaluation system with categories similar to those below. Candidates for positions should always attempt to make positive impressions. Read the information within each area and attempt to create the best possible impression by tailoring your interview style to highlight these special areas.

- **Appearance**: grooming, posture, dress, bearing, manners, neatness.
- **Preparation**: knowledge of company and positions. Asked pertinent questions.
- **Verbal skills**: delivery and animation, presentation of ideas, grammar, vocabulary.
- **Direction**: well-defined goals, confidence in abilities, realistic, practical.
- **Maturity**: responsible, self-reliant, and decisive.
- **Sincerity**: genuine, wholesome attitude, honest, sincere.
- **Personality**: enthusiastic, motivated, and assertive.
- **Qualifications/course work**: academic preparation, work experience, good match for position.
- **Overall evaluation**: long-range potential, drive, ambition, ability, qualifications.

Illegal Interviewing Questions
When it’s time to interview for a job, you can expect to be asked all sorts of questions, from “Why are you leaving your current employer?” to “Describe a situation when you could have tried harder, but didn’t.” You may not know that there are certain questions interviewers are NOT allowed to ask you. These questions usually pertain to your private life or personal background. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, race, age, national origin, or religion. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits employment discrimination against workers age 40 or older. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities act of 1991 protects people with disabilities from discrimination in any aspect of employment. The following examples are questions that employers may not ask in an interview.

1. How old are you? What is your birth date? (An employer CAN ask whether you are over the age of 18.)
2. What is your religion/worshipping preference?
3. Are you a republican/democrat?
4. Where were you born? What is your nationality? (An employer CAN ask whether you are a U.S. citizen.)
5. What is your native language? How did you learn to speak __________? (An employer CAN ask you what languages you are fluent in, if pertinent to the job.)
6. What is your maiden name? Have you ever changed your name? (An employer CAN ask you whether you’ve worked at the company in the past under a different name.)
7. Are you married? How many children do you have? Are you planning on having a family in the future?
8. Have you ever been arrested?
9. Do you own or rent your home? Do you live alone?
10. What is your race? Natural hair color?

If you are asked a question that you think is illegal, remember that the employer may not be aware that he/she is asking an illegal question. Rather than telling your interviewer that he or she is asking an illegal question, you can simply say, “I do not feel comfortable answering that question at this time.”

Try to answer any illegal questions as straightforward as possible. Try to turn the question around to focus on your strengths and to address any underlying concerns the employer may have. For example, an employer might be concerned about your commitment to his/her business if he/she asks, “Are you planning on starting a family soon?” A good answer would be, “There may be a family in my future plans, but right now my focus is on my career.”

Answering these types of questions, by focusing on your strengths, is a good way to answer a question without sounding like you don’t want to answer it. Of course, if the question is blatantly offensive, illegal, or constitutes sexual harassment, you can refuse to answer it and can report the interviewer to a higher authority in his/her company.

Helpful Web Sites:

Ask the Headhunter  http://www.asktheheadhunter.com/basics5.htm
Interviewing Tips  http://www.siop.org/tip/backissues/tipjul96/church.htm
Job Search  http://rlrresources.com/resource.html
Tough Interview Questions  http://sophia.smith.edu/cdo/job_search1.htm