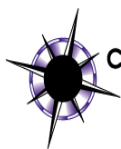


INTERVIEW GUIDE

This publication has been developed to meet the needs of K-State students. Other uses may be accommodated with permission by contacting the CES director.



Career and Employment Services

Guiding You from College to Career
Kansas State University

Career and Employment Services
Kansas State University
100 Holtz Hall
Manhattan KS 66506
785-532-6506
www.k-state.edu/ces
ces@k-state.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Services at CES	2–3
-----------------------	-----

Guidelines for Interviewing

Interview Formats

Behavioral Interview	4–5
Stress Test Interview	5–6
Phone Interview	6
Group Interview	6–7
On-Site Interview	7

Before the Interview

Research the Employer	8
Examine Your Skills	8–9
Practice Interviewing	9
Dress to Impress	10

Day of Interview	11
------------------------	----

During the Interview

PAR Method	12
------------------	----

After the Interview

Take Notes	14
Follow-up	14

Networking

Networking Strategies	15–16
-----------------------------	-------

Appendices

Appendix A: Common Interview Questions	17
Appendix B: Behavioral Interview Questions	18–19
Appendix C: Academic Interview Questions	20
Appendix D: Candidate Questions to Employers	21
Appendix E: Improper/Illegal Interview Questions ...	22
Appendix F: Thank You Letter Sample	23

MISSION OF CES

The mission of Career and Employment Services is to provide career advising, training, employment connections, and resources to K-State students, alumni, faculty, administration, employers and members of the community which the university serves.

CAREER RESOURCES

Utilize our print and online resources to learn more about resume writing, interviewing and the job search.

- View guides on resumes and interviewing
- Check out salary averages of recent K-State graduates
- Research employers
- Access free online resources such as Optimal Resume
- Utilize Perfect Interview; an interviewing software

CAREER ADVISING

Meet with a Career Advisor to discuss your career options and receive feedback on your job search and career planning questions. Learn more about:

- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Interviewing
- Employers and On-Campus Interviewing
- Internships & Co-ops
- Job Searches and the Hidden Job Market
- Career Fairs

CES EVENTS

We offer a variety of workshops and events to help you develop your job search skills and connect you with employers. Find dates and times for these events on our webpage, in the *Collegian*, or pick up a copy of our "How to Find a Job" flyer. Some of our events include:

- Resume Building
- Walk-In Wednesdays
- Dining Etiquette
- Career Fairs
- Government Jobs Panel
- Winning Interviews
- Resume Critiques
- Mock Interviews
- Overseas Teaching
- Dress to Impress

ACTIVATE YOUR ACCOUNT

Log on to www.k-state.edu/ces to activate your FREE account with Career and Employment Services. Activation allows you to:

- Post your resume online for employer review
- Participate in on-campus interviews
- View full-time job/internship/co-op listings 24/7
- Access employer contact information
- Manage your applications
- Receive announcements from CES
- Access password protected job resources

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWING

The interview is the single most important aspect of a successful job search. In fact, 90% of hires are based solely upon the interview, according to a Harvard Business Review study. Therefore, you must be able to effectively sell yourself and your skills to a prospective employer. This guide describes the different interview formats and provides a brief look at what you should do before, during, and after an interview. This guide also discusses networking strategies and the importance of networking.

INTERVIEW FORMATS

Interviews may be conducted in several different formats. The format will differ from employer to employer, therefore it is important to be aware of all the different formats. Some employers even use a combination of different formats during the interview.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

The theory behind this interview format is that past performance predicts future behavior. Behavioral interview questions are open-ended inquiries that may start out with the following phrases:

- Tell me about a time . . .
- How did you handle . . .
- What did you like about . . .
- What was your role . . .
- Describe a situation in which . . .
- Give me an example of when . . .

These open-ended phrases are often linked with the following topics:

- Communication skills
- Decision-making skills
- Personal attributes like initiative and flexibility

-
- Knowledge/experience
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Management abilities
 - Working conditions

All together, a behavioral interview question might sound something like this:

“Tell me about a time when you successfully demonstrated your communication skills.”

(See Appendix B for an extensive list of behavioral interview questions.)

In terms of your response, interviewers are looking for specific examples from your experience. You do not have to limit your answers to work experience. You can also use classroom, personal and volunteer experiences. The Problem-Action-Results (PAR) method described later in this guide is a great way to answer behavioral interview questions because it helps you focus on specific examples and your involvement.

STRESS TEST INTERVIEW

This interview is designed to “test” your reactions in a difficult situation and to put you on the defense by interrupting you, criticizing your opinions, and questioning your decisions. Typically, this format is used to interview candidates who will encounter very stressful situations on the job. The questions are planned, targeted, sequenced, and layered. Let’s look at an example sequence which might take place during a stress test interview:

Question 1: *Can you work under pressure?*

Question 2: *Good, I’d be interested to hear about a time when you experienced pressure on the job.*

-
- Question 3: *Why do you think this high pressure situation arose?*
- Question 4: *When exactly did it happen?*
- Question 5: *What in hindsight were you most dissatisfied with about your performance?*
- Question 6: *How do you feel others involved could have acted more responsibly?*
- Question 7: *Where in the chain of command could steps be taken to avoid this happening again?*

PHONE INTERVIEW

Employers often use phone interviews to screen candidates for on-site interviews. It is important to be prepared for a phone interview at a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk. You should:

- Prepare just as you would for a regular interview
- Have a few work-related questions ready for the caller
- Keep your resume in close reach and take notes
- Speak directly into the phone
- If the time is very inconvenient, ask if you could speak at another time and suggest some alternatives

⇒ **CES TIP:** Use a landline phone so that your chance of being disconnected from the interviewer is minimized.

GROUP INTERVIEW

Employers will interview a group of candidates at the same time in order to get a sense of your leadership potential and style.

Here are a few tips that will help you navigate through the group interview successfully:

- Observe the group dynamics and try to discover the “rules” of the game cued by the interviewer; if you are unsure of what is expected from you, ask for clarification from the interviewer
- Treat others with respect
- Avoid overt power conflicts, this will make you look uncooperative and immature
- Do something that makes you stand out from the rest of the candidates, such as be very articulate

ON-SITE INTERVIEW

The on-site interview occurs at the company’s location and is often the final step in the interview process. It is also your final opportunity to evaluate the company and determine if it is the right fit for you. You will be given the opportunity to see the inside of the company and meet with some of the key people: prospective bosses, co-workers, etc. This on-site opportunity will also help you gain a better understanding of the day-to-day work environment. Here are some tips to keep in mind in order to be better prepared for your on-site interview:

- Do not be afraid to ask your contact within the company (this is typically the person who conducted the initial interview) some of the following questions:
 - “Who will I be meeting with?”
 - “What is this person’s background?”
 - “Will there be any other activities scheduled?”
 - “What more can I do to prepare myself for this visit?”
- Bring extra copies of your resume, references, transcript, writing samples, and other relevant documents

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Practice and preparation are imperative to successful interviewing. A jobseeker going to an interview without having prepared is like an actor performing on opening night without having rehearsed. In order to prepare for your interview you should research the employer, examine your skills, practice interviewing and dress to impress.

RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER

After you receive an interview callback, ask yourself “Why do I want to work for this company, and how will I convey my interest during the interview?” To answer these questions, gather “specific” information about the company. Review the company website, literature and press releases, visit with current employees or contact a career advisor or professor. Research the employer on the following:

- Financial records
- Locations
- Reputation
- Major accomplishments/failures
- Products and services
- Major competitors
- Organizational structure/culture

EXAMINE YOUR SKILLS

During the interview, you will need to explain your knowledge, skills and experiences to the employer. Know why you want the job and why you would be the best candidate for the position. Review your resume before the interview and prepare answers to questions such as these:

- What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?

-
- What attributes do you bring to an employer?
 - Why should an employer want to hire you?
 - What knowledge/skills/experiences do you possess that are relevant to this position?

(See Appendix A to view more typical interview questions.)

Overall, your goal is to enthusiastically and effectively talk about your qualifications and experiences and how your attributes will contribute to the employer's goals and objectives.

PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

Prepare to make a positive and unforgettable first impression in the interview. Employers form an impression of you that may influence the rest of the interview and hiring process. Negative or forgettable first impressions usually will cost you the job. There are many avenues available to help you practice your interviewing skills to ensure a positive and lasting first impression:

- Schedule a mock interview with a CES advisor
- Participate in employer mock interviews
- Sign-up for a videotaped practice interview at CES
- Practice with a family member or friend
- Utilize Perfect Interview; an interviewing software available at CES

⇒ **CES TIP:** Practice interviewing in business casual or professional attire to realistically simulate an interview experience.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Appearance counts! A study by SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management); found that "63 percent of all hiring decisions are made during the first 4.3 minutes of an interview." Dress is extremely important because if you are unable to put yourself together in a professional manner during the interview, why should the employer think you can do it on the job? Here are a few guidelines to help you dress to impress:

- **DO NOT wear:** Jeans, midriff tops, open-toed shoes, and avoid excessive jewelry, make-up, cologne and perfume
- **Make sure you are clean and well-groomed:** Shoes are polished, fingernails trimmed, conservative nail polish, clean shaven, hair is styled appropriately, shoes and belt match, and dress one step above the office culture
- **Select a conservative, dark colored business suit:**

Men should wear a two piece suit, dress socks, unscuffed and shined shoes and an ironed, white or light colored dress shirt with coordinating tie.

Women should wear a conservative pant or skirt suit. Make sure the skirt is at least knee-length and wear pantyhose.

You can be fashionable without being too flashy or trendy. Business attire should not resemble club wear. The goal of an interview outfit is to show that you are professional.

If you have questions about what is appropriate, ask for a second opinion. You can also view sample interview outfits on the CES website at www.k-state.edu/ces.

⇒ **CES TIP:** Select your interview outfit in advance. Inspect for snags, tears, and rips.

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

You have prepared for the interview and now the day has arrived. Remember to stay calm, take a deep breath, and relax. Most employers will not rule out a job candidate simply because you might have a touch of nervousness during the interview. Keep in mind, however, that too much nervousness may indicate you do not react well to pressure. So on the day of the interview, remember the 4 “P”s:

- **Be Prepared:** Take a pen, notepad, and other relevant documents (extra resumes, references, letters of recommendation, writing samples, etc.) to the interview. Keep it all organized in a portfolio or briefcase. Practice your responses to commonly asked interview questions (see Appendix A) as well as practice your 15–30 second elevator speech (see Networking Strategies). It helps if you practice aloud. Review your resume so that it is fresh in your mind during the interview.
- **Be Poised & Professional:** Even before you walk into the interview room, the interview starts; so be ready to use your interviewing skills with everyone you meet in the building. While in the waiting room, smile and ask the names of everyone you meet, including the receptionist. Of course during the interview you should smile, refer to the interviewer by name, give a firm handshake, and make appropriate eye contact.
- **Be Punctual:** Arrive 10–15 minutes early for the interview and turn off your cell phone, PDA alarms and all other electronic devices. Look ready!
- **Be Positive:** As soon as you wake up on the day of your interview, think positive thoughts. Interviewing can be rewarding when you have the attitude that you will succeed. And of course, show your interest and excitement for the job to the interviewer.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

During the interview, you are being evaluated on two things: what you say and how you say it. Studies have shown that people gain meaning from less than 10% of what you say, which leaves the majority of communication to be ascertained by non-verbal communication and tone of voice. Practice with someone to ensure all of your communication is what you want the employer to perceive about you: energy, confidence, professionalism, etc.

Verbal: Answer the Question

The PAR Method is a great way to answer most interview questions because it helps you focus on specific examples and your involvement.

PAR Method

- **Problem:** Describe the situation or task
- **Action:** Explain what YOU did, what YOUR specific role was or what steps YOU took in the situation
- **Results:** Share the outcome

EXAMPLE (using the PAR model)

Question: *Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge as a team leader.*

PROBLEM: *Last year I was the team leader for a major class project. I assigned tasks to each of my team members. One member approached me to be reassigned since he lacked faith in his ability to perform the task.*

ACTION: *After discussing the problem with this member and then to the entire group, I identified the problem as no one on our team having the capability to execute the technical requirements of the project. I then found a technology consultant willing to assist us with our project.*

RESULT: *Outsourcing to compensate for our team's weaknesses allowed us to focus on our strengths. With this renewed focus, we were able to effectively prepare and the project far exceeded the expectations of the professor. I also received positive feedback from other groups and their respective leaders.*

Non-Verbal: Use Positive Body Language

Your body language can also describe how you are feeling and what you are thinking. It is important to keep your body language open and positive. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Firm handshake
- Direct eye contact
- Smile
- Nod attentively
- Relaxed facial expressions
- Stand tall and sit tall

⇒ **CES TIP:** Keeping your shoulders back and down helps with posture and makes you look more confident.

Tone of Voice: Use a tone of voice that positively reflects what you mean to say. Use the appropriate volume so all can hear, but yet not too loud.

Winning Interview Strategies:

DO NOT

- Fold your arms across your chest
- Fidget or play with objects on the table
- Chew gum or eat/drink
- Dwell on mishaps or negative experiences
- Inquire about salary and benefits, unless introduced
- Share negative stories about your previous employment

DO

- Listen intently to the interviewer
- Use gestures to emphasize main ideas or key words
- Ask questions
- Take a brief pause before you respond to each question

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, you are not finished yet. To be truly effective and to stay fresh in the interviewer's mind, take notes and follow-up with a thank you after the interview.

TAKE NOTES

Jot down notes directly after the interview. Record the positives and negatives regarding your performance. Also, include issues the employer emphasized (employee expectations, company challenges, etc.). This information can be effectively utilized in a thank you letter. Lastly, do not forget to record challenging or surprising questions to prepare for subsequent interviews.

FOLLOW-UP WITH A THANK YOU

Interviewers expect it! Use the most appropriate method from the following:

Thank you Letter: You can either type the thank you letter or handwrite a thank you note. The interviewer should receive the thank you letter before the hiring decision is made. Mail or hand in the thank you letter immediately after the interview, or at least within 1–2 business days.

Email: If your correspondence with the employer before the interview has been via email, then to follow-up with a thank you via email is most appropriate. Send the email immediately after the interview, or at least within 1–2 days.

Phone Call: If a thank you letter or email is not an option, then call and thank the interviewer the next morning after the interview.

⇒ **CES TIP:** In your thank you letter, reference details specifically emphasized by the interviewer. (View Appendix F for a sample of a Thank You letter.)

NETWORKING

Networking can be considered challenging, but not if you approach it as “just talking to people” for job info.

Networking is NOT:

- Contacting your rich cousin
- Asking someone for a job

Networking is:

- Talking to people you know, referrals, acquaintances and even people you have just met
- Systematic or planned and sometimes unplanned

NETWORKING STRATEGIES

Conduct an Informational Interview: The jobseeker and employer exchange information and get to know one another without reference to a specific opening. Employers that like to be informed of available talent are often open to informational interviews, even if there are no jobs available.

- Arrive with questions about the field and the company
- Give the interviewer your contact information and resume
- Obtain contact information of others who can help you; ask permission to reference the interviewer’s name
- Send a thank you note to the interviewer

Develop a plan of action: Decide who you will contact and how you will connect with these individuals.

- Search for people with your desired position
- Determine your preferred mode of communication
- Create a circle of contacts to help you: identify a list of professors, classmates, friends, previous employers, etc.

Prepare Good Questions¹:

- What along the way led you to this career path?
- What kind of preparation is needed for this job?
- What about your job differs from previously set expectations? Any surprises or myths?
- Who are your company's competitors?
- Who else do you recommend I talk to?

Develop an elevator speech: This is a 15–30 second speech that briefly tells an employer or any networking contact about you. The speech often responds to the prompt “Tell me a little bit about yourself.” The specifics of the response often change depending on your audience. Consider the below guidelines:

- Introduce yourself
- Tell what you do: focus on what you do that would benefit the prospective employer
- State your competitive edge or what is unique about you

Create a networking letter: Write a letter to generate informational interviews; this is a good strategy that allows the person to contact you when it is convenient.

⇒ **CES TIP:** View sample elevator speeches and networking letters at www.jobstar.org or www.collegegrad.com.

¹Donald Asher (2006): *Networking From Scratch A College Students Guide to Building Contacts*

Appendix A: Common Interview Questions

- Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would you describe your best day?
- Do you feel you have done the best scholastic work of which you are capable? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Why did you decide to attend this school?
- After attending this school, what single most important statement conveys your experiences while enrolled?
- What do you think determines an individual's success in a work situation?
- Do you consider yourself a leader or a follower? Why?
- Do you prefer working with others or by yourself? Why?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Why are you interested in this organization? What about this job do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?
- What are your short-term goals? Long-range plans?
- What major problem(s) have you faced in the workplace?
- How long would it take for you to make big contributions?
- What do you consider to be your most significant accomplishment? Why?
- What will be the most difficult aspect of making the transition from college to your career? Why?
- Are you willing to relocate? To travel?
- What would your references say about you?
- Why should we hire you?

Appendix B: Behavioral Interview Questions

- Describe how you organize your work day and week.
- Give an example of your leadership experience.
- Give an example of a time when you were able to communicate with another person or group, even though they may not have liked what you were saying.
- How do you ensure someone understands what you are saying? Give an example.
- Describe in detail the most challenging report you had to write.
- Give examples of some of decisions that you have had to make rapidly and those that took more time.
- Describe a major project in which you needed help. What did you do? Why did you ask particular people to help?
- How do you measure success? Give an example.
- Describe a situation where you had to adapt to an initially uncomfortable environment.
- Tell me about a time when you had a personality conflict or disagreement with a co-worker. How did it resolve?
- Tell me about a time when you had to manage multiple projects simultaneously.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give a specific example of when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

Appendix B: Behavioral Interview Questions

- Give an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give an example.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you made this last year.
- Give an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish failed.
- Give an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give an example of when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a project that you delegated effectively.
- Give an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me how you handled an ethical dilemma.

Appendix C: Academic Interview Questions

- Tell us about your dissertation.
- How does your research relate or compare to what has been written already? How did you contribute to the field?
- What has been the most difficult challenge you have faced?
- If you were going to begin again, what changes would you make in your dissertation?
- What are your future research plans? What resources do you need to conduct that research?
- What is your most important publication? Do you have plans for others? Why don't you have any publications?
- What makes you a good teacher?
- What's your teaching philosophy?
- What about teaching has been challenging? Enjoyable?
- How would you teach a survey course in your field?
- What special seminars could you offer?
- Having not taught a large lecture course, how would you?
- What would be your favorite course to teach?
- In choosing a course load, what's your ideal preference?
- What are your strengths outside of the classroom, such as in volunteer/community service projects?
- What contribution can you make to the department?
- Why are you interested in this school?
- If you have more than one job offer, how will you decide?
- What limitations might you have in the selection process?

Appendix D: Candidate Questions

- What specific skills or personal characteristics do you believe are important for successful performance in this position?
- What qualifications are most important to a person's advancement within your company?
- What type(s) of training programs will be made available to me as a new employee?
- What do you consider to be the biggest challenge(s) I would face if I am hired?
- What would a typical day be like?
- How often will my performance be evaluated?
- What are the things you like most/least about working here?
- Why are you looking to fill this position? Is it a newly created position?
- Can I let you know why I want this job?
- How do you typically make a decision?
- What has been your career path in the organization?
- What will be the measurements for my success in this position?
- What business problems keep you awake at night?
- What would you consider to be exceptional performance from someone in the first 90 days in this position?
- What is your vision for your department over the next two to three years?
- What are your organizational values?
- When can I expect to hear from you on your decision?

Appendix E: Improper/Illegal Questions

Improper interview questions are those that do not pertain to the nature of the job or to the applicant's ability to perform that job, or those which are not asked of every candidate. They are illegal when the information is used in a discriminatory manner to make a hiring decision.

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to improper and illegal interview questions. It might help, however, to think of one of two courses of action: answer in brief and move on to a new topic area, or ignore the question altogether and redirect the discussion to a new topic area. Federal, state, and sometimes even local laws exist which prohibit employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, sex, citizenship, and disabilities. The following are examples of some of the specific areas that employers cannot ask or inquire about during an interview:

Race: Any question related to complexion, color of skin or other inquiries directly or indirectly indicating race or color.

Religion: Any question related to religion or religious preferences or affiliations.

National Origin/Citizenship: Questions related to your nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, birthplace, descent or parentage.

Disabilities: General inquiries about disabilities or health conditions that do not relate to job performance.

Arrest Record: Employers cannot ask you if you have ever been arrested but they can ask you if you have ever been convicted of a crime that is reasonably related to the performance of the job.

If you have encountered questions from an employer that fall into these categories, we encourage you to share your concerns with CES.

Appendix F: Thank You Letter Sample

May 22, 2000
Susan E. Wabash
Senior Human Resources Manager
Acme, Inc.
555 Laramie Drive
Kansas City, MO 64444

Dear Ms. Wabash:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the accountant position at Acme, Inc. yesterday. I truly enjoyed meeting with you and John Duncan and learning more about Acme, its current activities and upcoming projects. The potential opportunity to work with a company that places such a strong priority on innovation, employee satisfaction and productivity is very exciting to me.

As we discussed, I am confident that my quality academic training at Kansas State University and my hands-on experience working in the accounting department at JKL Apparel Company last summer qualify me for the position. In addition, my extensive knowledge of computer systems would be especially valuable as an accountant with Acme.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me at (785) 555-1234 if I can provide additional information or answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Melanie S. Lindman
1234 State Street
Manhattan, KS 66502
(785) 555-1234

CES Resources

The CES Holtz Hall Library has a number of resources available for students to borrow. Stop by the front desk to check out a book or video on the following topic areas:

Resume Building

- *Resumes that Knock 'Em Dead*
- *The Curriculum Vitae Handbook*
- *The Global Resume and CV Guide*
- *The Resume Catalog: 200 Damn Good Resumes*
- *Competency-Based Resumes*

Cover Letter Preparation

- *175 High Impact Cover Letters*
- *Cover Letters that Knock 'Em Dead*

Interviewing Effectively

- *The First Five Minutes: How to Make a Great First Impression in Any Business Situation*
- *Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed*
- *101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions*
- *Dining Etiquette Workshop*
- *Preparing for the Behavior-Based Interview*

To access the online career resources collection, go to the CES webpage at www.k-state.edu/ces