Preparing to Interview

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Roadmap

• Setting yourself apart
• Interviewing techniques
• Preparing for interviews
• Questions asked during the interview
• After the interview
• General interviewing tips
Setting Yourself Apart

Distinguish yourself by:

• Treating the interview as the only opportunity you will have to speak with the employer

• Obtaining inside information about the organization through research and your networking contacts (alumni, faculty, friends, etc.)
Setting Yourself Apart

Characteristics of strong candidates:

- Relevant work experience
- Analytical skills
- Technical skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Communication skills
- Leadership
- Academics
- Motivation
- Teamwork
Setting Yourself Apart

Employers want people who:

• Bring something of value to the table (make a contribution to their organization)
• Look like they can handle the job
• Appear to be dependable workers
• Convince them they have enough job–related skills/training to handle the job or can learn quickly
Research the Employer

• Review the job description looking for key skills
  – Link your interview responses to what the employer is seeking
• Perform an informational interview with an alumni, faculty member, or friend to gain additional information about the company/position
• Search the company website
• Understand the Mission Statement
• Look for company literature and press releases
Interviewing Techniques

The Basic Format

• **Introductory Stage**
• **Review of your background, interests, and abilities**
• **Discussion of employer’s potential opportunities and how you fit or match**
• **Conclusion– points are clarified and questions are asked/answered (i.e., a two-way exchange)**
Interviewing Techniques

Structured vs. unstructured

• **Structured** – Interviewer asks a prescribed set of questions, seeking relatively brief answers

• **Unstructured** – Interviewer asks more open-ended questions to prod the candidate to give longer responses and reveal as much as possible

Some interviewers mix the styles.
Interviewing Techniques

Behavioral interviews

• Built on the belief that past performance is the best predictor of future success

• Rather than ask how you would perform, you are asked how you did perform – “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of...”

• Use a PAR or STAR method to answer (examples in resume guide):
  – Problem, Action, Result
  – Situation, Task, Action, Result
Interviewing Techniques

Telephone interviews (often occurs prior to a face-to-face interview)

- Take a surprise call in stride
- Allow the company representative to do most of the talking
- Speak directly into the telephone
- Keep your answers brief and factual
- Take notes
- Have a few work-related questions prepared
- Don’t hesitate to ask for clarification
- Smile into the phone (relays your personality)
- Have your materials available for you to access
Interviewing Techniques

On-Site Interviews

• Be prepared
• Be able to respond to questions, ask your own questions, and observe the environment
• Know you are being evaluated from the time you arrive to when you leave.
• Understand your worth and be prepared for a salary discussion
• Take notes and record your impressions
• Remember: the hiring decision is based not just on your qualifications, but the employer’s total impression of you.
Preparing for the Interview

Review Dress to Impress section of the CES website:

• Dress to suit your interviewer and the position for which you are interviewing
• Dress one level above the position you are interviewing for
• Dress conservatively and wear fresh, neat, and pressed clothing
• Avoid excessive make-up, jewelry, and perfume/cologne
Preparing for the Interview

Researching the Employer

- Structure of the organization
- Products that are produced
- Services that are provided
- Financial status of the organization
- The organization’s competitors
- The reputation of the organization
- Recent accomplishments/changes
Preparing for the Interview

Types of skills to incorporate into your responses:

• **Technical/Professional** – *skills related to performing within a job, task or class, acquired by reading, training, or education*

• **Functional** – *skills related to people, information or things that are transferable from one field or occupation to another*

• **Personal** – *skills that represent your style of working– often called personal traits or self-management skills*
Preparing for the Interview

Nonverbal Communication:

• **Eye contact:** single most important form of nonverbal communication
• **Facial expressions:** smile often, but naturally
• **Posture:** stand and sit tall
• **Gestures:** limit the amount of hand movement as it can be a distraction
• **Space:** be aware of your personal space and that of the interviewer
• **Body language:** should be open and confident
• **Avoid nervous actions**
Questions Asked

Review the CES Resume and Interview Guide for sample questions:

• **Commonly asked questions** *such as:* Tell me about yourself, What are your strengths, or where do you see yourself in five years?

• **Behavioral based questions** *such as:* Tell me about a time when you overcame a challenge. Describe a situation in which you were the team lead. Provide an example of time a time you tried something new and failed.

• **Illegal/Improper interview questions** *such as:* National origin, religion, marital status, number of children, etc.
Preparing for Behavioral Questions

*Use PAR or STAR statements:*

**P:** Describe the **problem**

**A:** Tell about the **action** YOU took (not as a group)

**R:** What was the **result** (how did it turn out)?

*or*

**S:** Describe the **situation**

**T:** or describe the **task**

**A:** Tell about the **action** YOU took (not as a group)

**R:** What was the **result** (how did it turn out)?
Preparing for Behavioral Questions

Speak to a variety of professional experiences when answering:

- Part-time job
- Class projects
- Research
- Volunteering
- International experience
- Activities/leadership experiences
Preparing for Behavioral Questions

• Review your resume line-by-line. Your goal is to recall situations that show favorable behaviors or actions and prepare short descriptions for each situation. Expand on what you’ve provided on your resume

• Use appropriate examples to back-up your statements

• Focus on the positives, don’t dwell on negative situations
After the Interview

• Write a follow-up/thank you letter immediately

  – *If they have communicated with you via email, then email is appropriate. If not, send a hand-written note that day.*
  – *Personalize it for each interview. Refer to something you discussed that will help them remember you.*
General Interviewing Tips

• Treat everyone you meet as if they are part of your interview (they likely are)
• Even if the interviewer is more casual, maintain your professionalism and be personable
• Keep your answers thorough but brief (1–3 minutes)
• Ask for clarification when needed
• Share your eye contact with all interviewers
• Speak loud enough for everyone to hear you, don’t yell
• Avoid discussing salary or benefits preferably until they make you an official job offer but definitely until they put a number on the table
• Gather business cards from the interviewer(s) to follow-up later
Contact CES

Kansas State University Students or Alumni,
For a mock interview with a CES advisor, please contact CES at:

100 Holtz Hall
www.k-state.edu/ces
785.532.6506
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Thank you!