

# **The 1, 2, 3's of Interviewing**

A guide to interviewing

WorkAbility IV

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Interviewing is a step in the employment process where the employer has the opportunity to meet with the candidate. At this point the employer has reviewed many resumes and is now ready to seriously consider a new employee. The purpose of this meeting is to interact with the individual and evaluate their skills and social abilities. If you have made it to this step, then the job is up to your interaction skills and selling yourself.

The information we are providing in this handbook is to assist you through this stage. We will review the following: the challenges and fears that confront us before an interview and how to overcome them, how to prepare for the interview, how to answer interview questions, asking the interviewers questions, ending the interview, thank you notes and letters, and the follow-up. It's now time to get started.

## **The “fear” of interviewing**

The interview in its basic form is the “exchange of communication from one to another/or panel”. The fear that we begin to create is a result of not knowing the questions the interviewer will ask or the setting for the interview (e.g., one-on-one interview, panel interview, the number of interviews, etc.). As a result of this fear, one may have a difficult time in accomplishing the goal of a successful interview. To overcome this fear, one must prepare in advance so that they may minimize the anxiety that builds within. There are three basic steps in minimizing the fear.

First, to overcome this challenge we must be relax and calm. If this is difficult, find an exercise that will help you relax, decrease nervousness and allow you to concentrate. If you do not have one, try breathing exercises or simply taking a short walk to help clear your mind. These exercises may help release tension and allow for the mind to focus on the task at hand.

Second, envision the interview as a meeting between to old friends who are reacquainting themselves. Seeing it in this light may reduce the pressure we place on ourselves before the encounter. While you are sitting in the lobby before being called-in for the interview, try to relax and think of a funny situation that has happened in the past. Remembering these experiences will help put you in a happy and positive frame-of-mind.

Third, we must be prepared for anticipated questions that the interviewer may ask. This, if any, is the most important factor in decreasing fear and nervousness. Doing one's homework

prior to the encounter will show that we are serious about the meeting and the position we are pursuing.

## Preparing for the interview

A successful interview relies heavily on the preparation of anticipated interview questions (**Sample questions are located on the last pages of this handbook**) and the amount of knowledge we have gathered about the position and organization. Preparing for the interview includes the following: researching the position and the organization, answering anticipated interview questions, dressing to impress, and participating in mock interviews.

Researching the position is easily done by reviewing the job posting and identifying the important tasks that the individual will perform. A job description or task may state “ability to work with senior level clients”. This simply states that you will have to work with all levels of an organization, but specifically with executives, owners or general managers. Knowing this, the answers to the questions will focus on how you have previously worked or collaborated with these individuals. If you do not have this experience, state how you have the ability and skill to develop and excel in building working relations with these individuals.

Researching the organization can be done by going to the company’s website, searching for information on the web or by calling their office and speaking with the receptionist. The receptionist is a great resource because they know about the position and the company, who the hiring managers/individuals are, and they can also put in a good word for you. So remember to always be nice and courteous to everyone within that organization, especially the receptionist because they can possibly keep you from landing that job if you have treated them rudely.

After participating in many interviews, you will see that the interviewers will ask many of the same questions. Knowing this, you can prepare for anticipated questions, which will help ease nervousness in interviewing. The questions that are posed to the interviewee is to see how they would respond to particular questions, how they physically react to the questions, and to test their knowledge on the subjects. Remember, your preparation will show in your response to the questions and in the confidence of your answers.

Dressing appropriately for an interview will leave a long lasting impression on those you meet. Many individuals have lost job opportunities without uttering a single word, because their

outfit screamed, “I’m sloppy” or “I’m here for the Party”. Men should wear a business suit (jacket and slacks are acceptable), a tie, belt, a nice pressed long-sleeved collar shirt, and polished shoes. Women should wear a business outfit that may include a dress, slacks/skirt with a blouse and a jacket (jacket not always necessary), and polished shoes. Jewelry must be kept at a minimum and avoid wearing anything that can be viewed as “flashy” (e.g., women – large hoop earrings, men-a studded earring). Always remember to keep good hygiene and avoid wearing perfume or cologne that can be overpowering (keep it subtle).

Mock interviews are very important to the success of the interview. Simulating the event will help with preparedness and in decreasing the fear. Show up to the mock interview as though you were going to the real thing. This means dressing appropriately so that the interviewer may critique your dress, in how you carry yourself, and in how you answer the questions. Receiving this information now will help in ensuring that you do not make that mistake when the “real interview” happens.

## **Arriving at the interview**

When you have been called for an interview and the time & date have been confirmed, plan enough time for you to get there fifteen minutes before the interview. Drive the day before the interview, around the same time that you will be driving the next day, to ensure that you know how to get there and traffic has been considered for your allotted time of travel. Try to get enough sleep the night before the interview so that you do not go in with “blood-shot-eyes” for that 9am interview.

You should only take what is needed to the interview. Do not take large bags or book-bags because this can be viewed as “sloppy” dress. Take a folder where you can carry your resume, a pad to write on, and a pen to write with. Women should keep their bags to a small enough size where personal items (e.g., wallet, identification card, social security card, small cosmetic bag, etc.) can be kept.

When you have arrived at the location, be polite and courteous when introducing yourself to the receptionist/greeter, and let them know who you are there to see and for what reason. For example, “Good morning. My name is John Doe and I’m here to see Mr. Smith for a 9am interview”. Do not forget that this person can play a vital role in you being offered a position,

so be friendly and smile. They will normally ask you to take a seat and tell you that Mr. Smith will be with you shortly. You may have to fill-out an application, especially if this is the first interview, so have all your materials (e.g., resume; list of company names, addresses, phone numbers, name of direct supervisors, salaries, and the dates you were there; References name, phone number and address) in your folder. The folder will provide a hard surface to complete the application because many offices do not have tables for you to use, and you will possibly be filling-out the form with the folder on your lap.

When waiting in the lobby, do not bring unnecessary attention to yourself by asking too many questions, making noises, pacing back-and-forth, fidgeting in your chair, or disrupting other visitors. Sit there quietly and smile. Following all these steps will help you in setting a good image of yourself to the employees of that company.

## **The interview**

The receptionist/greeter may tell you that the interviewer is ready to see you and direct you to the room, or, the interviewer may come-out and meet you themselves. If the interviewer comes out to meet you, extend your hand out to shake and introduce yourself. In any case, try to say “thank you” to the receptionist/greeter prior to going in to the interview room (only do this if the situation permits). The interviewer will ask a few questions, small talk (e.g., “how was your drive”, “any traffic”, “did you easily find our location”, “how is the weather”), before you actually begin the interview. This is done to break the ice/tension of the interview and helps build communication between both.

When you enter the interview room, there might be other individuals there who are part of a panel. Introduce yourself to each of them and ask them where they would like you to sit. The interviewer who first met you may provide these instructions and will introduce each of them (who they are and their titles) when you enter the room. So follow his or her cue. Ask them if they will need a copy of your resume before they begin. Remember to be polite and positive.

## Handling questions and responses

During the interview, the interviewer is looking to see how we respond to the questions they pose. The manner in which you answer the questions says a lot about the individual. If the response is negative in its tone, then the person may feel that you see the world through dark colored glasses. The person you are speaking with is looking for someone to be a part of their team who will not be an emotional drain on their staff and will add a positive environment at the worksite. Remember that everyone will be working together for eight to ten hours a day and they do not want any disruption within the unit.

The answers to the questions should provide the interviewer with a brief synopsis of what you've done in the past and how you either learned from it or how your previous employer benefited from it. This will show them that you are always looking to improve or maintain what you're currently doing as an employee, or that you have a team player mentality and that you understand that the team/employer is more important than your own personal agendas.

An example of a negative answer that an interviewee gave during a past interview was as follows:

*Interviewer:* “Describe a situation where you were responsible for the outcome of a project?”

*Interviewee:* “Well, I was in charge of overseeing a fundraising event where our goal was to raise as much money as possible. I really did not like this role because nobody wanted to listen to me. Staff showed-up late for their assignments and the event sponsors were very rude. I know I could have done a better job but I had to work with incompetent people”

A positive answer could have looked like this:

*Interviewee:* “I have recently worked on a fundraising event where I was chiefly responsible for the outcome. My goal was to ensure that the event ran smoothly and that the sponsors were pleased with the turnout. Having cooperative staff and vendors who supported us through the whole process, resulted in a very successful event. The organization was able to meet its financial targets and my supervisors were very pleased with my work.”

How you answer these questions is crucial to your success. If you are a negative individual, then learn to be positive for only the interview and up until you are hired. You can always go back to your cranky-self once you have secured employment and have established yourself on the job.

A question that we must always be prepared for is “Tell me a about yourself”. Many of us fail this question because we provide too much unnecessary information. We disclose family situations (e.g. married, divorced, separated, etc) or we let them know how many children we have and the challenges faced (e.g. getting them ready for school, their always getting sick, etc) in raising them. This type of answer may persuade the employer not to hire you because your answer was not prepared, or, by being married and having children may translate into someone who is going to be out because of sick family members.

Answer this question by providing information that relates to the position you are applying for. Give them the knowledge and skills you have acquired at previous jobs and during the pursuit of your degree, and how you will apply that skill and knowledge to the position. This introductory answer should be between one to two minutes long and should emphasis how you can be a valued asset for their organization.

## **Handling difficult questions and responses**

The challenge in answering a difficult question is in how we respond to it. The interviewer is not trying to confuse or baffle the interviewee, but is looking to see if they are prepared with a reasonable response and the manner in which it is delivered. A question that many of us often here and have a difficult time in responding to is “Tell me of a weakness you have”? This question is really trying to see how you think and not so much emphasis is placed on the substance of the answer.

The way to answer this question is to start by saying, “An area that I believe I can improve on is....” The reason why this answer works so well is because the interviewer is given the impression that we have self-identified an area we feel that more knowledge or skill is needed. In other words, the interviewee is saying they are a proactive person and not a reactive one. Employers are very happy to hire individuals who are proactive, which might result in higher production for their business. A reactive individual is seen as one who waits for things to happen and will not take initiative to increase production or business.

Do not use any of the following answers, “I do not have a weakness” (this can be viewed as a sign of arrogance), “I have trouble with public speaking” (even though this may be true, employers want to hire people who can communicate with other staff members and with their customers).

An example of an answer that is positive and proactive is “An area that I believe I can improve on is in keeping abreast of all the new software that is available. Software manufacturers are constantly updating their programs and I try my best to expose myself to the new changes”. This answer has worked well for many individuals who have had to answer such a question.

## Questions to ask the interviewer

At the end of the interview, it is always helpful to ask a few questions of the interviewer. This provides the interviewee an opportunity to have a better understanding of the position. You should keep the number of questions to two or three. There will be other opportunities to ask more questions during the second or third interview (most positions require several interviewing steps before an offer is made). Ask the interviewer relevant questions about the job and what the key essentials are needed to succeed in the position (**Sample questions are located on the last page of this handbook**). Do not begin to discuss salary or benefits unless the interviewer brings up the subject. There will be an opportunity to negotiate when and if an offer is made.

You can ask them what the next step in the process will be and by when they will notify/make a decision on who will be moving forward.

## Ending the interview

Leaving a good last impression on the interviewer is key to a successful interview. The interviewer may ask you one last question, “Why do you feel you’re the best candidate for the position”. The answer to the question should not be more than one minute and should encompass all your strengths. It should also include how your skills and knowledge will provide you the foundation to succeed in whatever may challenge the position. Reassure them with your answer that if you are hired, they will see you as a valued asset for their organization.

Allow for the interviewer to cue you that the interview is over and depart by thanking them for the opportunity they have provided. When you get up to leave, look them in the eyes with a smile on your face and say “I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for the opportunity to meet with you”.

### **After leaving the interview**

When you have left the office or location of the interview, take a moment to reflect on how the interview went. Try to do this within fifteen and twenty minutes from the end of the interview because everything is fresh in your mind. Identify and write down the questions they had posed to you and your responses to them. Reflect on how the interviewer reacted to your responses because body language (e.g., facial expressions, moving of hands or arms, etc.) can say what they are feeling or thinking. Remember that interviewers will ask the same questions, so if you review your responses you will be able to improve each one. This will result in better answers to those questions during your next interview.

The next step after you have arrived at home is to send out a “Thank you” card or letter by mail to those who interviewed you. The card or letter should state your pleasure in meeting with them and that you are very interested in the position. A card is preferred because it is short and precise, which means the individual will not have to spend too much time out of their busy schedule to read it. An example of a “Thank you” message that you might write on the card is:

Mr. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule and providing me an opportunity to interview. The position of \_\_\_\_ is one where I can excel in and apply the knowledge and skills I have acquired over the years. I look forward to possibly hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,  
John Doe

Writing a “Thank you” card or letter will set you apart from many individuals that have interviewed for the position, because not everyone takes the time and effort to write them. This

also provides the opportunity for the interviewer to remember who you were and might put you ahead of others that they are seriously considering for the position.

## **Follow-up**

The follow-up contact to the interviewer should only be made if you have not heard from them and a timetable was given. If they had stated to you that they were going to make a decision within two weeks and would notify you no matter what the decision (yes or no) was, then wait for that call or letter. If you do not hear from them or receive a letter, then wait until the end of the third week to call them. When you call, state that you are interested in knowing the “status” of the position. They will normally let you know if you will be scheduled for another interview, if they have not made a decision, if they will offer you the position, or whether they have decided to pursue another more qualified candidate. They may tell you that a letter has been sent to you and to wait for its instructions. No matter what the outcome, do not persistently call the location to find out the status, because it is unprofessional to do so and may also keep you from obtaining that position or any future consideration with that company.

## **Last words**

This interviewing handbook was designed to provide you an overview of the interviewing process, the challenges we face and the needed steps taken to ensure that your interviewing experience is positive and successful. Maintain an optimistic outlook in this process and you will see that good things will happen for you. **GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR INTERVIEWS!**

## **Sample Interviewing Questions**

**Tell me about yourself?**

**Tell me of a successful Project**

**Tell me of unsuccessful Project?**

**Describe an experience where you were faced with a challenge and how did you overcome it?**

**What is it about the position that appeals to you?**

**Have you ever been fired or forced to resign?**

**Do you consider yourself a team player and what is your idea of a team player?**

**How do you handle multiple priorities?**

**What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?**

**What can you tell us about our company?**

**Why did you leave your last job?**

**What are some of your strengths?**

**What are some of your weaknesses?**

**Where do you hope to be in five years?**

**If I were to call your last employer, what would they say about you?**

**Describe the best supervisor you've ever had.**

**Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor? How did you resolve the conflict?**

**Why haven't you worked in the last few years?**

**Can you explain this gap in your employment history?**

**What didn't you like about your last employment?**

**Do you have any hobbies? What do you do in your spare time?**

**Why did you choose this career?**

**How is transportation for you?**

**Are you willing to travel for the job?**

**Why do you feel that you're the right candidate for the position?**

**Why should we hire you?**

### **Sample Questions to ask the Interviewer**

**What challenges do you foresee for the individual who is awarded the position?**

**What skills are needed to be successful in the position?**

**Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?**

**What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?**

**What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?**

**How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom?**

**How often?**

**Can you describe the company's management style?**

**Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?**

**Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?**

**What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future?**

**The biggest threat?**

**Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?**

## **A List of Reference Websites**

Office for Students with Disabilities - California State University Los Angeles

[www.calstatela.edu/univ/osd/](http://www.calstatela.edu/univ/osd/)

Career Center - California State University Los Angeles

[www.calstatela.edu/univ/cdc/index.htm#](http://www.calstatela.edu/univ/cdc/index.htm#)

**The following are sites where you can find answers to general employment questions, interviewing questions, and search job postings.**

[www.caljobs.ca.gov](http://www.caljobs.ca.gov) – Sponsored by the California State Employment Development Department

[www.americasjobbank.com](http://www.americasjobbank.com) – Sponsored by the United States Department of Labor

[www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com)

[www.hotjobs.com](http://www.hotjobs.com)

[www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com)