

# INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

## *LEARNING HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CONFIDENCE*

### *THE PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW*

- Goal of Candidate:** Gather information on position and employer.  
Evaluate position, job-setting, co-workers.  
Determine if position is suitable – “Do I want to work here?”  
Communicate information about yourself – convince employer to hire you because you are qualified for the position.
- Goal of Interviewer:** Promote organization.  
Attract the best candidate, gather information, and assess candidate’s qualifications.  
Determine if the candidate fits the position.

## *THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW IS PREPARATION...BE PREPARED!*

### *Here’s how...*

#### *KNOW YOURSELF*

- What are my skills and abilities? What are my strengths?
- How do my skills and experiences relate to the position and employers’ needs?
- What contributions will I bring to the employer?
- Am I willing to relocate?
- How do my values compare to the philosophy of the organization?
- What points do I want to be sure to get across during the interview?
- How does this position fit into my career goals?
- If interviewing in a country other than your home country, do you understand the cultural expectations?

#### *PREPARE YOURSELF*

- Obtain a copy of the job description.
- Use the employer information in the Academic & Career Advising Center and on the employer’s websites to gather information (annual reports, employee handbooks, policy statements, employee newsletters) on the organization.
- Locate the employer’s home page on the Internet.
- Conduct informational interviews with persons in similar positions to learn about the career field and how your skills may apply. Use the Longwood Career Network to identify candidates.
- Develop a list of appropriate questions that reflect your research.
- Be sure to know the culture of the country where you are interviewing. U.S. employers are expecting you to articulate your future career goals and past accomplishments. They are assessing you according to American values such as self-confidence, initiative, directness, and individualism.

## ***PRACTICE***

- Review attached list of questions most asked during an interview as well as list of questions to prospective employers.
- Practice answering interview questions (out loud).
- **Schedule a mock interview**, through the Career Center, to gain experience and feedback.
- Be aware of your body language...what is your body language under pressure?
- Remember to smile and **be yourself!**

## ***CHECKLIST***

- Confirm date, time and place of interview.
- Pack several copies of your resume; a list of references, including names, titles, addresses and telephone numbers; writing samples if appropriate; and letters of recommendation.
- Dress appropriately (conservative business attire).
- Be punctual. Plan to arrive early.

### ***THE INTERVIEW...Conduct your interview with confidence and style***

#### **Here's how:**

Firm handshake.  
Make eye contact.  
Listen carefully.  
Show your interest in the position and the organization.  
Be positive.  
Show your confidence.  
Maintain good posture.  
Avoid one-word answers.  
Ask questions.  
Relax and be yourself.

### ***BEHAVIORIAL INTERVIEWING – “The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior”***

Behavioral interviewing is a relatively new interviewing technique now being used by many organizations. The behavioral interview process involves the employer identifying the skills required of the job and developing a set of questions designed to elicit behavioral examples (the candidate's descriptions of experiences providing evidence for or against a skill).

- The interviewer uses a lot of open-ended questions to assess your knowledge and skills.
- To prepare for behavioral interviewing, identify the skills you possess that relate to the employer's needs.
- Identify examples from your work/college experience in which you use those skills. Be prepared to give examples during the interview.

- Practice answering sample behavioral interviewing questions (attached). Also consult the complete list of behavioral interview questions available in the Career Library.

### ***CASE INTERVIEWING***

Case interviews are a way for employers to see how your mind works and how logically you approach a problem.

When an interviewer asks you a case question, you are encouraged to ask your own questions. This accomplishes several objectives. First, even if you don't receive additional information, you have shown the interviewer that you are not shy about asking questions under difficult circumstances. Second, it helps turn the question into a conversation. The best interviews are conversations, not Q&A sessions.

The most used types of case interviewing are the "Guess the Number" and "Business Problem." An example of "Guess the Number" is attached.

### ***FOLLOW-UP***

- Review what happened in the interview. Reflect on your strengths and areas that could use some improvement... How might you better prepare yourself?
- Send a hand-written or typed thank you note as soon as possible after the interview.
- In the case of an on-campus interview, discuss any apparent violations of rights or unethical conduct with a Career Center staff member.

### ***COMMONLY ASKED STANDARD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*** ***Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer***

Questions start the minute the interview does, and to show that you are an exceptional candidate, you need to be prepared to answer not only the typical questions, but also the unexpected. You can expect questions regarding your qualifications, your academic preparation, career interests, experience, and ones that assess your personality.

- What are your long range and short-range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- How did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? And weaknesses? What are you doing to overcome your weaknesses?
- How do you think a former supervisor or professor would describe you?
- How has your college career prepared you for a career in...?
- We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this career?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? How?
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Why did you select Longwood and how did you arrive at this decision?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?

- What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your abilities?
- How have you changed personally since starting college?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- To what do you owe your present success?
- What motivates you?
- If you could change a decision you made while at college what would you change and why?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- What extra-curricular activities have you been involved in? How did you choose these involvements? What have you gained from these involvements? What did you contribute?
- Describe a leadership role of yours and tell why you committed your time to it. What was your greatest challenge in this role?
- Give me an example of an idea that has come to you and what you did with it.
- What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you deal with pressure?
- Tell me about a time when you failed and how you handled it.
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
- What characteristics do you admire in others?
- Do you work better in a group or alone? Why?
- If you were hiring someone for this job, what qualities would you look for?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer.
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- Tell me about yourself or how would you describe yourself?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to her or him.

### ***BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS***

- Describe a time when you were faced with a problem at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give me an example of a time when you were especially hard working.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your written/oral communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Give me an example of a time when you were proud of your ability to cope.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.
- Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
- Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to analyze another person carefully or a situation in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision.
- What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in desired direction.
- Describe a situation in which others within your organization depended on you.
- Describe your most recent group effort.
- Give me an example of a time when you were resistant to change.

- Give me an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your oral communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Give an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates.
- Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
- Give an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
- Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching the goal.
- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation that you've completed.
- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a complex problem and the steps you took to solve it.
- Discuss a situation/time when you had to work with (a) complete stranger (s) and how you dealt with it.
- Discuss a time when you had to learn something in a short amount of time and how you went about learning it.
- Discuss a time/instance when you and your boss/professor had a disagreement.

### ***SAMPLE OF CASE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*** **“Guess the Number”**

“You and I are sitting in an empty room with no telephone, reference books, or computers. Can you tell me how many disposable diapers were sold in the U.S. last year?”

In answering this question, all you have to work with are assumptions. If you are unsure about an assumption or unsure about what is being requested from you, do not hesitate to ask questions of the interviewer. It is perfectly acceptable to use pen and paper during this question. While you are in the process of solving this problem, you are also trying to remember the numbers you've just stated. Many students write down the numbers, while others diagram the problem. The point is that there is nothing wrong with writing things down. Remember, they are more interested in how you get your answer than they are your answer.

The following is one possible answer:

I am going to assume that the population of the U.S. is 250 million people. I am going to further assume that the average life expectancy in the U.S. is 75 years. For simplicity's sake, I am also going to assume that there are an equal number of people in each age group. So 250 million people divided by 75 different age groups equals 3.3 million people in each age group. Children wear diapers from age zero to age three, so that's three years. Three point three million children times three years equals 9.9 million, so let's say ten million children. Out of those ten million children, I am going to assume that 80 percent of them wear disposable diapers. That's eight million children. I also think that children go through about five diapers a day. Newborns maybe more than five, three-year-olds maybe less, so we will assume five diapers a day. Eight million kids times five diapers a day equals 40 million diapers a day. So 40 million diapers a day times 365 days a year is your answer.

Another possible answer is:

I am going to assume that the population of the U.S. is 240 million people. I am going to further assume that the average life expectancy in the U.S. is 80 years. These 80 years represent four generations. So 240 million people divided by four generations equals 60 million people per generation. Each generation represents 20 years, so 60 million people divided by 20 years equals three million people per year. Children

wear diapers from ages zero to three, so that is nine million children. Out of those nine million children, I will assume that one-third wear cloth diapers, so six million wear disposable. Children wear about five disposable diapers a day. Six million children wearing five diapers a day equals 30 million diapers a day. So 30 million diapers a day times 365 days a year is your answer.

## ***GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER***

### ***Questions You Can Ask During an Interview***

Asking questions indicates to the employer that your job search has been well thought out. Your interest in the organization resulted in thorough research and preparation.

The following are samples of questions prepared to start you thinking about questions you can ask in an interview. Do not memorize these samples but do sit down, study them and figure out how they translate into suitable questions for the organization you are interviewing.

- Will I work independently or with others?
- To whom will I report?
- Who will evaluate my work?
- Does the organization endorse promotion from within?
- What will my training involve?
- What kind of person do you find to be successful in this job?
- What skills have you found to be valuable in this job?
- Are there any recent or anticipated changes in the structure of the organization (mergers, cutbacks)?
- What are the department's/company's strategic goals? How are they developed and reviewed?
- Who is the competition in this field and what are you doing to get ahead of them?
- How long have you been with the organization?
- If I want to further my education, does the organization offer tuition benefits?
- What are your short-term and long-term expectations of me?
- Would you mind describing the duties of the job for me, please?
- Is this a new position? Was the previous incumbent promoted?
- What do you consider ideal experience for this job?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff now?
- Could you tell me about some of the primary people I would be dealing with?
- May I talk with the person who last held this job? Other members of the staff?
- At what step are you in the hiring process?
- How soon can I expect to hear from you?
- Can I provide you with any other information to help you in the decision making process?

## ***HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS***

By Rochelle Kaplan, General Counsel for the National Association of Colleges and Employers. She specializes in employment law and in legal issues pertaining to recruitment and employment.

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you, the job candidate. An employer's questions—whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process—must be related to the job you're seeking. For the employer, the focus must be: "What do I need to know to decide whether this person can perform the functions of this job?"

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- You can answer the question—you're free to do so, if you wish. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that isn't related to the job; in fact, you might be giving the "wrong" answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.

- You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational—hardly words an employer would use to describe the “ideal” candidate.
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, the interviewer asks, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?” You’ve been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Similarly, let’s say the interviewer asks, “Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?” You might answer, “I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires.”

Below are examples of some illegal questions and their legal counterparts.

Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
National Origin/ Citizenship	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue"?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (This question is okay only if this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital/ Family Status	What's your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child-care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? (This question is okay if it is asked of all applicants for the job.) Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (This question is okay assuming it is asked of all applicants for the job.)
Affiliations	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?	List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.
Personal	How tall are you? How much do you weigh? (Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job.)	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
Disabilities	Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list them and give dates when these occurred. . What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health? When did you lose your eyesight? How? Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? (This question can be asked only after a job offer has been made.)	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? (This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.) Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions? As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results.)
Disabilities	Why do you use a wheelchair and will we have to make any accommodations for the wheelchair?	Will you need any accommodation to participate in the recruiting process?
Disabilities	Tell me all of your disabilities	What are your job skills, educational background, and prior work experiences?
Arrest Record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of ____? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)
Military	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

## ***THE OFFICE VISIT/INTERVIEW***

**Purpose:** Allows the organization to get a more in-depth assessment of the candidate prior to making a job offer. Allows the candidate an opportunity to see the organization and some of its people first hand in order to make a wiser decision if an offer is made.

**Preparing:** Candidates should prepare so that they can present themselves as being knowledgeable about the organization, its products or services, and the career opportunity being discussed. The better prepared the candidate, the more probable it is that the organization will recognize enthusiasm, drive, motivation, maturity, and thoroughness as assets possessed by the candidate. Use this information to develop insightful questions designed to show interest in the organization and the position.

**Travel Plans:** An invitation to an organization will usually come from the contact person. This person becomes the candidate's source of information about all aspects of the trip. Any questions prior to the trip can be addressed to the contact person.

Many office visits are one full day in length and require an overnight stay in the city where the organization is located. Travel can be by car, plane or train. Some organizations are prepared to schedule all the arrangements for the visit. They will reserve and pre-pay the hotel room and schedule and pre-pay the flight, but might offer these conveniences only when requested by the candidate. If the organization is not pre-paying the flight or hotel room, the candidate needs a method of payment. Be sure to get receipts for hotel and all transportation costs if not prepaid by the organization. You may be able to use them as deductions on your income taxes, if the company does not pay for it.

### ***AVAILABLE IN CAREER RESOURCE ROOM***

**Interviewing/Salary Negotiation Books** for review in the Career Center Resource Room on interviewing include but not limited to:

- *101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions*
- *Networking Skills That Will Get You the Job You Want*
- *The Quick Interview & Salary Negotiation Book*

**Academic & Career Advising Center  
Lancaster G08-A  
434-395-2063  
career@longwood.edu  
www.longwood.edu/career/**