

We know you are aware that luck is only a small portion of what it takes to secure employment. Being thoroughly prepared for any situation will dramatically increase your chance of success. Toward that end, we have prepared the attached documents to make sure your interview experience goes as smooth as possible. These documents include:

- Interview Checklist
- Probing questions to ask during interview
- Twenty (20) tough questions to be prepared for
- In the interview tips
- Come prepared to the interview

SAMPLE PROBING QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING INTERVIEW

- How does the mission of your group/department support the overall objectives of the company?
- What are the most critical aspects to this position?
- What characteristics (personal and technical) must an individual possess to be successful in this job?
- What resources (people, financial, equipment, etc.) are available to support the person in this job?
- Could you detail how the person in this job might interact with:
 1. Other group/dept. employees? _____
 2. Senior management? _____
 3. Clients? _____
 4. Vendors? _____
 5. Any others? _____
- How would you describe your personal management style?

INTERVIEWING TIPS FOR CANDIDATES

Interviewing Checklist

- **BE PREPARED**
Know yourself - your strengths, weaknesses, and accomplishments. An interview is not a time to “wing it.” Prepare as much as you would for a presentation to the Board of Directors of your company. An interview is equally as critical.
- **BE INVOLVED**
The most effective interviews are those where an active two-way conversation prevails. Not the typical question and answer type. Begin early in the interview to interject your own inquisitive and probing insight.
- **BE ENTHUSIASTIC**
First impressions, positive or negative, dramatically affect the ultimate evaluation. You can make or break an interview in the first five minutes.
- **BE WELL DRESSED AND GROOMED**
Appearance is a critical evaluation component.

- **ESTABLISH YOUR WORTH**
Be able to discuss specific accomplishments that demonstrate a proactive attitude, e.g., have you installed systems, did something not required to do, saved money, trained someone on your own.
- **KNOW YOUR SIX KEY STRENGTHS**
Be prepared to discuss for 1-2 minutes each, in detail, with examples, your five or six main attributes. These should be the ultimate reason you should get the job over someone else.
- **GIVE 1-2 MINUTE RESPONSES**
Communication is the key to successful interviewing. A minimum of 1 or 2 minutes of well-prepared discussion provides insight into your intellect and supports your contentions.
- **PROVIDE EXAMPLES/DETAILS**
Support statements about yourself with specific examples. These “sinkers” provide legitimacy to your claims. Without them the interviewer never accepts them as valid.
- **RESEARCH THE COMPANY**
Find out as much as you can about the company through annual reports, newspapers, “Value Line”, “S&P” reports, etc. This effort will become evident in the interview and immediately brand you as proactive, hardworking and astute.
- **REMAIN ATTENTIVE**
Stay alert during the interview. Maintain good eye contact. Sit forward in your chair. Be animated. Show high interest level. Stay enthused. These actions can maintain or generate momentum during the interview.
- **BE SELF-CONFIDENT**
High self-esteem and self-confidence are the hallmarks of the successful individual. Be able to demonstrate how you have overcome obstacles with confidence. There is nothing wrong with feeling good about yourself.
- **DON'T GET COCKY**
Arrogance and overbearing attitude can offset the finest abilities.
- **ASK PROBING QUESTIONS**
A few strategic questions can clearly demonstrate your intelligence, analytical skills and assertiveness. Have these prepared from your research. Avoid the superficial questions.
- **BE FRIENDLY AND OUTGOING**
Smile and say “hi” to everyone. A positive reaction from the support staff is an important factor in the evaluation.
- **STATE YOUR INTEREST**
At least by the conclusion of the interview, state that you are definitely interested in the position, and would like to know when the next step will take place. It's best to show this interest throughout the session. Don't over do it though.
- **BE 5 TO 10 MINUTES EARLY**
Punctuality is a subtle clue to attitude and behavior style. Lateness, no matter what the excuse, is a major “faux pas”.

- **BE POSITIVE ABOUT EMPLOYEES**
Do not “bad mouth” previous positions, companies, or employers. No matter how well founded, this implies a negative attitude, one typical of those that don’t take personal responsibility for their actions.
- **BE PREPARED FOR KEY QUESTIONS**
Practice your responses to all the typical questions, e.g., “Tell me about yourself”...”Why are you looking?”...(See our list of 20 questions). “How well” you speak will have a bigger impact than “what you say”.
- **WRITE “THANK YOU” NOTES**
This is a “class” action. It demonstrates you as professional, sensitive, and can convey sincere interest. An excellent touch. Send the thank you's to me via email, and I can forward directly to the manager.
- **HAVE AN OBJECTIVE AND DISCLOSE UPON IT!**
Establish an objective before the interview, like a second interview or an offer. Ask for it if you have not achieved it. “...Do you think my skills fit your needs?” ...gets to the point and, at worst, reveals other objectives to overcome.

Twenty Tough Questions and Tough Answers

- **TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?**
Just talk for two minutes. Be logical. Start anywhere, e.g., high school, college, or first position. Looking for communication skills, linear thinking, also try to score a point or two (describe a major personal attribute).
- **WHY ARE YOU LEAVING YOUR CURRENT POSITION**
This is a very critical question. Don’t “bad mouth” previous employer. Don’t sound “too opportunistic.” Best when major problems, or buy-out, or shutdown. Also good to state that after long personal consideration chance to make a contribution is very low due to company changes. Still attempt to score points!
- **WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENT?**
This can get you the job. Prepare extensively. Score points. Tell a two-minute story, with details and discuss personal involvement. Make the accomplishment worth achieving. Discuss hard work, long hours, pressure, and important company issues at stake.
- **WHY DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE QUALIFIED FOR THIS POSITION?**
Pick two or three main factors about the job, and about you that are most relevant. Discuss for two minutes, with specific details. Select a technical skill, a specific management skill (organizing, staffing, planning) and a personal success attribute to mention.
- **HAVE YOU EVER ACCOMPLISHED SOMETHING YOU DIDN’T THINK YOU COULD?**
Interviewer is trying to determine your goal orientation, work ethic, personal commitment, and integrity. Provide a good example where you overcame numerous difficulties to succeed. Prove you’re not a quitter and “that you’ll get going when the going gets tough.”
- **WHAT DO YOU LIKE/DISLIKE MOST ABOUT YOUR CURRENT OR LAST POSITION?**
 - Interviewer is trying to determine compatibility with the open position.. If you have interest in the position, be careful. Stating you dislike overtime or getting into the details,

or that you like “management” can cost you the position. There is nothing wrong with liking challenges, pressure situations, opportunity to grow, or disliking bureaucracy and frustration situations. [Never make negative comments about current or former employers.](#)

- **HOW DO YOU HANDLE PRESSURE? DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE THESE SITUATIONS?**
High achievers tend to perform well in high-pressure situations. Conversely, questions also could imply that the position is pressure packed and out of control. There is nothing wrong with this as long as you know what you’re getting into. If you do perform well under stress, provide a good example with details, giving an overview of the stress situation. Let the interviewer “feel” the stress by your description of it.
- **THE SIGN OF A GOOD EMPLOYEE IS THE ABILITY TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE. CAN YOU DESCRIBE SITUATIONS LIKE THIS ABOUT YOURSELF?**
The proactive, results-orientated person doesn’t have to be told what to do. This is one of the major success attributes. To convince the interviewer you possess this trait, you must give a series of short examples describing your self-motivation. Try to discuss at least one example in-depth. The extra effort, strong work ethic and creative side of you must be demonstrated.
- **WHAT’S THE WORST OR MORE EMBARRASSING ASPECT OF YOUR BUSINESS CAREER? HOW WOULD YOU HAVE DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY NOW WITH 20/20 HINDSIGHT?**
This is a general question to learn how introspective you are. Also, to see if you can learn from your mistakes. If you can, it indicates an open, more flexible personality. Don’t be afraid to talk about your failures, particularly if you’ve learned from them. This is a critical aspect of high potential individuals.
- **HOW HAVE YOU GROWN OR CHANGED OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS?**
This requires thought. Maturation, increased technical skills, or increased self-confidence are important aspects of human development. To discuss this effectively is indicative of a well-balanced, intelligent individual. Overcoming personal obstacles, or recognizing manageable weaknesses can brand you as an approachable and desirable employee.
- **WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT STRENGTHS?**
Be prepared. Know your four or five key strengths. Be able to discuss each with a specific example. Select those attributes that are most compatible with the job opening. Most people say “management” or “good interpersonal skills” in answer to this. Don’t, unless you can describe the specific characteristics of management (planning, organizing, results, staffing, etc.) or how your relationship skills have proven critical to your success.
- **WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT WEAKNESSES?**
Don’t reveal deep character flaws. Rather discuss tolerable faults that you are working toward improving. Show by specific example how this has changed over time. Better still, show how a weakness can be turned into a strength. For example, how concentration on the details results in higher quality work even though it requires much overtime.
- **DEADLINES, FRUSTRATIONS, DIFFICULT PEOPLE, AND SILLY RULES CAN MAKE A JOB DIFFICULT. HOW DO YOU HANDLE THESE TYPES OF SITUATIONS?**
Most companies, unfortunately, face these types of problems daily. If you can’t deal with petty frustrations, you’ll be seen as a problem. You certainly can state your displeasure at the petty side of these issues, but how you overcome them is more important. Diplomacy, perseverance, and common sense can often prevail even in difficult

circumstances. This is part of corporate America and you must be able to deal with it on a regular basis.

- **ONE OF OUR BIGGEST PROBLEMS IS...WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THIS? HOW WOULD YOU DEAL WITH IT?**
Think on your feet. Ask questions to get details. Break it into sub-parts. It is highly likely that you will have some experience with the subsections. Answer these and summarize the total. State how you would go about solving the problem, if you can't answer directly. Be specific. Show your organizational and analytical skills.
- **HOW HAS YOUR TECHNICAL ABILITY BEEN IMPORTANT IN ACCOMPLISHING RESULTS?**
Clearly the interviewer believes he/she needs a strong level of technical competence. Most strong managers have good technical backgrounds, even if they have gotten away from the detail. Describe specific examples of your technical wherewithal, but don't be afraid to say you are not current. Also, you could give examples of how you resolved a technical issue by "accelerated research".
- **HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE A SITUATION WITH TIGHT DEADLINES, LOW EMPLOYEE MORALE, AND INADEQUATE RESOURCES?**
If you pull this off effectively, it indicates you have strong management skills. Need to be creative. An example would be great. Relate your toughest management task, even if it doesn't meet all the criteria. Most situations don't. Organizational skills, interpersonal skills, and handling pressure are key elements of effective management. Good managers should be able to address each issue, even if they were not concurrent. Deftly handling the question is pretty indicative of your skills, too.
- **ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH YOUR CAREER TO DATE? WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE IF YOU COULD?**
Be honest. Interviewer wants to know if he/she can keep you happy. It's important to know if you're willing to make some sacrifices to get your career on the right track. Degree of motivation is an important selection criteria.
- **WHAT ARE YOUR CAREER GOALS? WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF FIVE YEARS FROM NOW? TEN YEARS?**
Most importantly, be realistic! Blue-sky stuff brands you as immature. One or two management jumps in 3-5 years is a reasonable goal. If your track indicates you're on line for senior management in 10 years, it's okay to mention. However, if you've had a rocky road, better to be introspective.
- **WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU FOR THIS POSITION? WHAT KIND OF CONTRIBUTION WOULD YOU MAKE?**
Good chance to summarize. By now you know the key problems. Restate and show how you would address. Relate to specific attributes and specific accomplishments. Quality responses with the need to gather information. Don't be cocky. Demonstrate a thoughtful, organized, strong effort kind of attitude.

Come Prepared to the Interview!

Gather as much information as possible about the group before the meeting. Review their website or ask the group contact if there is any material, such as a marketing plan or a product specification that you could read to familiarize yourself with the group and its products. The more research you've done on your own, the more in depth your conversation can be in the meeting.

- Bring a copy of the posted job description to the meeting. The hiring manager may have made modifications since originally opening the position, and having the physical job description with you will give you a good starting point for this discussion.

Develop a list of questions to ask during the meeting.

- Tell me where your team is in the (development, writing, selling, testing, etc.) process.
- What challenges have you faced so far? What aspects of the project are going well?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current team? How have the strengths/weaknesses affected your progress towards your goals?
- What kinds of skills and experience do you expect a successful candidate to have coming into this job, and why?
- What do people on this team do to continue their professional development? How does the group support them in their development?
- Do you see yourself in this department one year from now? Why or why not?
- Where will this department/technology/team be next year?
- Who are your team's customers? What are their expectations? What percentage of the time does your team meet customer expectations? If it is not 100%, what would it take to get there?
- What will this group do when you finish your current project? When will you begin planning the next project? What role do the team members have in that planning?
- What are the key selling points of this team?
- What are some typical career paths for someone in this position?
- How would you describe your management style?
- What are your biggest challenges in your role? Your greatest successes?

Remember that this is a two-way evaluation. Make sure your questions are answered in the meeting. Use paraphrasing and/or follow-up questions if necessary. The informational interview is your chance to determine that the job is right for you!

Be yourself! Nothing turns a hiring manager or interviewer off quicker than a candidate pretending to be something he or she is not. Tell the truth on your resume and in conversation - and expect to be asked in detail about any skills or experience you have referenced.

In the Interview

Knowing what interviewers are probing for will help you focus and phrase your responses to interview questions. You may interview with multiple people if you move forward onto second interviews or a large interview loop of up to four people.

Ability - Can you do the job? How strong your skills and experience are, is part of the picture; but knowing them well enough to articulate them in an interview is another. Saying, "I can do this job - give me a chance to prove it to you" will probably not suffice. You will have to demonstrate your ability and suitability for the job in the interview.

Willingness - Will you do the job? Are you willing and able to do what is necessary to help the team succeed? Will you take the hard times as well as the easy ones? Be prepared to discuss how, with examples from past experience.

Communication/Interpersonal Skills - Will you be easy to work with? How well do you communicate with others? Can you work independently as well as with a team? Do you take direction and criticism well, even when it is not carefully and considerately given? Again, think of examples to highlight in the interview.

Problem solving - Everyone hires for the same job. Regardless of the job, we are all hired to solve problems on some level. Be ready to discuss your problem solving skills. Think about the most difficult problem you've been faced with, the steps you took to solve it performance and respond to questions on your successes and failures and the part you played in both.

If you have time between each interview, use it wisely. Note the name of each person you met, some of the interview questions, a quick self evaluation on your responses, things you have learned, or questions that may have arisen. You can then use this information for the next interview to ask clarifying questions. Your notes will also help jog your memory on how each interview went - this is helpful when discussing the feedback with your Internal Resource Specialist (IRS).

Honesty is Still the Best Policy

Be honest on your resume and in the interviews. An undiscovered lie can come back to haunt you, and a discovered lie can destroy your credibility. An employer does not want to work with someone whom they cannot trust, and failure to tell the truth creates an impression that is very difficult to change.

Be consistent in what you tell interviewers. Don't claim to have skills or experience that you don't really have. If it's on your resume, be prepared to answer questions and give examples. Don't try to fake it, you'll likely get caught.

Be candid. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so! Oftentimes interviewers are more than happy to help you work through a problem if you ask for assistance.

So, Why Do You Want This Job?

Believe it or not, one of the biggest disqualifiers of candidates is a lack of demonstrated interest in the job. You should be prepared to explain why you are looking for a new job, and why you have chosen THIS job in particular.

There are often several candidates interviewing who are qualified to do the job based upon skills and experience. Therefore, just having the appropriate technical skills and experience does not make you a shoe-in for the position. An individual who demonstrates an interest in the technology / dept / project is more likely to leave interviewers with the impression that they will add value to the team and will fit in well with team members. If you were the hiring manager, wouldn't you be more likely to hire someone who is enthusiastic about the job?

- Interview only for positions that truly are of interest to you. If you are looking for a new job simply to get out of your current job, it will be evident to the interviewers. Focusing on a few specific positions will also allow you more time to develop skills needed for the job, and to research and prepare for the interviews.
- Learn all you can about the group's technology and projects before the interviews.
- If you can demonstrate a long-term interest, you'll have an additional advantage.
- Take an interest in the interview itself. If nothing more, it is a great opportunity to learn more about yourself, as well as another area of the company.

Body Language - It Counts!

"When our body language doesn't contradict our statements, our message will gain a great deal of impact. But when our body language contradicts what we say, it is human nature for the interviewer to be skeptical." - Martin Yate, Knock 'Em Dead

Things to remember

- Body language can be interpreted at a conscious and/or subconscious level.
- An interviewer will rarely ask you to stop doing something that bothers them, or makes them feel uncomfortable. They probably will, however, make a mental note of the fact that they were annoyed in the interview.
- Be aware of the importance of eye contact in an interview setting.

Things to avoid

- Invading the interviewer's personal space by sitting too closely.
- Folding or crossing the arms, or holding things in front of the body, can send a negative, defensive signal.
- Clasping your hands behind your head can be interpreted as smugness or arrogance.
- Slouching in your chair with hands in pockets or thumbs in belt can leave the interviewer feeling that you are rude and disrespectful.
- Constantly adjusting your collar, or picking at your clothes are often considered signs of nervousness, as are pen tapping, fidgeting with objects, and tapping or swinging your leg.
- Silence is sometimes imposed by the interviewer onto the candidate to see how they react to stress. Avoid the temptation to retract, mutter, or fidget in the face of silence.

Interview Turnoffs

Interview turnoffs reported by 320 businesses/organizations for The Placement Center, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

- Arrogance/overconfidence
- Poor communication/presentation skills
- Being unprepared for interviews and making excuses
- Tardiness
- Poor eye contact
- Abrasive/rude/demanding
- Dishonesty/fabricated answers in interview or on resume
- Shallow/inappropriate questions or answers
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Lack of initiative, assertiveness
- Inability to demonstrate interest and qualifications
- Inflexibility

- Lack of fit between candidate's qualifications/career goals and job specifications
- Inconsistent responses to interview questions
- Canned answers