

UCONN Waterbury
CAREER SERVICES

THE JOB INTERVIEW



- A. Interviewing:** What is it?
- B. Interview Format:** What should you expect in an interview?
- C. Preparing for an Interview:** What are the steps you can take to be ready?
- D. Questions:** What are typical interview questions and how can you answer them? What should you ask employers? What are improper employer questions?
- E. Follow-up:** What are the steps you should take after an interview? If offered a position, how should you accept or decline? What about salary?
- F. Types of Interviews:** What are the different styles employers use?
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**A. INTERVIEWING:
WHAT IS IT?**

- **The interview is the employer's best chance to size you up.** It is your best chance to sell yourself and get the job!
- **Interviewing is a skill.** It improves with practice. Each interview provides you with an opportunity to learn more about yourself, the working world, and the types of positions or organizations that match your needs
- **An interview is a dialogue.** You and the employer meet each other, share information, and come to a tentative conclusion about the "match" between you and the position. It serves as an opportunity for you to make an oral presentation of your qualifications and to highlight your strengths.
- **An interview is a two-way process.** The employer is provided an opportunity to assess how well you communicate, how well qualified you are, and your level of motivation. While the employer is assessing you, they are also selling or marketing the position to you. You, as a candidate, should be attempting to identify whether or not you would want to work for the particular organization.
- **Remember - an employer is using the interview to evaluate the "total" you.** This includes your attitude, appearance, confidence, level of preparedness, knowledge of yourself, knowledge of the position and organization, and your ability to successfully perform the skills required. *It is important to be yourself and convey an enthusiastic and positive attitude.*



B. INTERVIEW FORMAT

Initial Greeting/Icebreaking - The first impression is very important. The interviewer may attempt to relax you by making small-talk and establishing rapport. *To prepare, make sure you make eye contact, offer a firm handshake, and call the interviewer by name (using Mr. or Ms. or other title as appropriate).*

Career Interest and Goals - You will be asked to explain your interest in the position, organization, and career field and to articulate your short and long-term goals. If your career goals are inconsistent with the organization's needs and interests, you will most likely be screened out. *To prepare for this and display well-defined, realistic career plans, you need to research the field prior to the interview.*

Organization Information - The interviewer will tell you about the position and organization. If a recruiter talks continually, you will need to find a way to politely interject your own comments and highlight your interest in the position. You may be asked questions that will reveal what you know about the organization. *To prepare, you must research the organization before your interview.*

Matching Your Qualifications to the Position –Employers look for tangible results in work experiences, academics, community activities, and leadership positions and how they match up with the position. *To prepare, write down how your experiences fit with the position description.* Give specific examples using positive action verbs emphasizing your accomplishments. The interviewer will want to know what kind of judgment you have, what motivates you, and what you can offer the organization. *To prepare for this, review your resume and anticipate questions from it.*

"What if" Situations - The interviewer may pose a hypothetical situation and ask you to give your response to the problem. It is difficult to plan for every possible situation. *To prepare for this, accept the possibility as a challenge rather than panicking.*

Your Questions – An interview is a two-way conversation. Normally at the end of the interview, you will hear “Do you have any questions for me?” You should have a number of questions prepared (samples are listed in this packet) ahead of time. It is okay to write them down and refer to your notepad.

*The interviewer does not want to answer questions covered in company literature.
It is generally inappropriate to ask about benefits and salary during the screening interview.*

The Closing – The interviewer should take the initiative to end the discussion. Watch for verbal and non-verbal clues so you do not go on and on. If the interviewer does not tell you what the next step in the process will be, ASK. Finally, reaffirm your interest in the position and organization and make a brief but strong summary statement that repeats your interest and strengths. Thank the interviewer for his/her time.

C. PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Get ready for the kind of questions the interviewer is likely to ask.

“Tell me about yourself.” Be prepared to discuss what you could offer the organization as well as your reasons for wanting to work for the particular employer.

Analyze your strengths and weaknesses and know exactly what you want to say during the interview. Evaluate problem areas in your background and be prepared to offer a positive explanation of these in case they are brought up.

Prepare a list of questions for the interviewer.

What do you want to know about the job? Let the employer know that you are considering his/her organization just as they are considering you. Ask questions that imply that you have done good research, not that you are clueless! (See D. Questions)

You are strongly encouraged to practice a mock interview with Career Services. Do this before the actual interview so that you can improve your interviewing techniques and become familiar with the "feel" of an interview situation.

Self-assessment: know yourself!

You must know your goals, values, interests, skills, abilities, and needs. This is so you can articulate “who you are” during the interview and be able to decide if the job is right for you. *Meet with Career Services where assessments are available to help you identify your preferences, skills, and interests.*

Research the position and the employment market

The key to success in any interview is preparation. Know as much as possible about the position for which you are applying and the occupational field you are entering. *Thoroughly research the issues and trends related to the type of work you would be doing and be prepared to "speak the language" of the professionals who work in the field. Learn about the:*

- Function and size of the organization
- Potential for growth or expansion
- Products and/or services
- Reputation
- Location of facilities
- Structure of the organization
- Financial stability of the organization
- Types of clients/customers served
- Opportunities for training
- Competitors in the field
- Relocation policies
- Typical entry-level positions
- Typical salary ranges for your desired position
- Typical career path in your field

Resources for researching employers/organizations

You can find information about the organization from:

- People in the field
- *Alumni employed by the organization: Check out Husky Alumni Network on line.*
- Organization literature, Chambers of Commerce, trade journals, newsletters, professional and trade associations, and company home pages on the Web
- Annual reports and employer literature
- Newspapers, business magazines, and other periodicals in UConn's library

Researching Salary

Use resources such as www.salaries.com

Dress

The way you dress contributes to an employer's first impression of you and suggests the image you will present on the job if you are hired. Type of dress varies according to the kind of position and organization with which you interview. Dress as others do in this type of position. You should wear the same type of attire for screening interviews as you would for on-site interviews.

For positions such as banking, sales, management, and insurance, a conservative suit (i.e., navy or gray, solid or pinstripe) is appropriate. For fields such as retail, merchandising, and advertising, a more colorful and stylish suit is acceptable.

Less conservative (but still professional) attire is suitable for social service, education, and arts-related positions. Men can wear dress pants, shirt, jacket, and tie; women can wear a skirt, pantsuit, blouse, and blazer or a dress with jacket. Be certain your shoes are polished, hair is neatly combed, and make-up, jewelry, and scent are not excessive or distracting.

D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: WHAT WILL THE EMPLOYER ASK? WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK? WHAT ARE IMPROPER EMPLOYER QUESTIONS?

The Employer May Ask: (along with questions specific to the job description)

1. **“Tell me about yourself.”** Be succinct. Focus on your academics and experience and how it relates to the job. Ask yourself, “What are the top five things I want this person to know about me?” You can talk about personal qualities and career goals as well, and how you manage stress (working out, walks, etc).
2. **“Why do you want to work for XXX?”** This is where you demonstrate the research that you have done on the organization.
3. **“What do you see yourself doing five years from now?”** The interviewer wants to know you will be happy in the position, or if you want to work in it only as long as it takes to find something “better”.
4. **“What skills can you bring to our organization?”** Students who have interned or have relevant job experience generally answer the question best because they know what working for an organization entails.
5. **“What’s your greatest strength?”** Do not just talk about the strength, for example, saying that you are organized, but relate it to the position.

6. **“What’s your greatest weakness?”** You can say something along the lines of, “I have difficulty in the area of xxxxx and these are the strategies I am using to improve. So far, it has been working.”
7. **“Tell me about a time when your course load was heavy. How did you complete all your work?”** You may say, “Last semester I was taking 21 credits, so I made sure I had a day planner and mapped out all my assignments.”
8. **“Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish a task with someone who was particularly difficult to get along with.”** Here, the employer wants to hear that you can be sensitive to others, but can still influence and work with them.
9. **“How do you accept direction and, at the same time, stay true to your ideas and values?”** An internship, summer or part-time job experience can give you the experience to answer this question. If you have gained interpersonal skills on the job, you can understand how to walk this fine line.
10. **“Tell me how you handled an ethical dilemma.”** If you cannot give a situation you handled correctly the first time, you can say how you have learned from your mistakes.
11. **“Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a problem with no rules or guidelines in place.”** The employer is looking for someone who can initiate action quickly, and how you can overcome obstacles.
12. **“Why should I hire YOU?”** This is a chance for you to make yourself stand out from the competition.

Behavioral Interview Questions: Prepare so you will not be intimidated!

- An employer may say, *“Tell me about a time when you made a major sacrifice to achieve a work-related or personal goal,”* or *“Describe an experience where you were especially creative in solving a problem.”* Each question requires an example. The interviewer may not continue until you have provided a specific example. The interviewer will not permit you to get by with generalities.
- You must prepare to be successful in behavioral interviews. You must be able to recall many experiences quickly, select the most appropriate one, and then describe it effectively. One way to prepare is to think of five to ten experiences that relate to the job description.

Behavioral Questions You May Be Asked:

- “Describe an experience where you were especially creative in solving a problem.”
- “Describe a situation where you had to take the initiative.”
- “Tell me about a time where you had to motivate others in order to complete a job.”
- “Explain a recent situation where you worked on a team to solve a problem. What role did you assume and what was the outcome?”
- “Tell me about a time at work where, in retrospect, you wished you could have done something differently.”

YOU can ask questions about: (Just pick two or three)

- The type of training available if not described in the organization literature
- The three top priorities they would like to see accomplished in the first six months
- The most challenging and rewarding parts of the job you are applying for
- Performance appraisal procedures
- What the typical career path is of a person in the position

- What each interviewer likes and dislikes about their job
- The work environment
- The management or supervisory style
- What the makeup of the team is as far as experience goes. Will you be a to mentor or will you be mentored
- What the organization values the most and how your work will further these values
- The opportunity to pursue further education
- What they think you can bring to the organization to round out the team
- Professional development opportunities
- What a typical day on the job would be like
- Whether people typically eat lunch together or at their desks
- The overall structure of the department within the larger organization
- If it is company policy to promote from within
- What characteristics a successful person has working for the organization
- Anything that comes up during the course of the interview that may spark a question
- Their timeline for making a decision

Improper employer questions

Discriminatory questions are hard to define in many cases. Below are areas about which the employer should not be asking. They do not relate to how well you can do your job.

- | | | | |
|-------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| • religion | • spouse's | • political | • marital status |
| • ancestry | occupation | affiliation | • age of children |
| • age | • language you | • birthplace | • sexual |
| • number of | speakers at home | • national origin | orientation |
| dependents | | | • disability |

What if you are asked an improper question? You can answer the legitimate concern that probably lies behind the question while ignoring the exact question. For example:

Q. "Do you (or your wife) plan to have any children?"

A. "I plan to pursue a career whether or not I decide to raise a family." or "I have that taken care of and I don't anticipate any absences from the job."

Underlying Assumption: The employer had a genuine concern about how long you may remain on the job or that extended periods of leave may be required.

It is important for you to decide *before you interview* just how sensitive you are to some prohibited topics. The following tips may help you to prepare:

- Make a list of sensitive questions you may be asked.
- Rehearse different ways of answering so that your reply will come out naturally.
- Practice. The more interviewing situations you go through (real or mock interviews), the more comfortable you will become when confronted with an improper question.

E. INTERVIEW TYPES

Initial Screening Interviews

- are conducted by a recruiting specialist. They may be held at a Career Fair, on a college campus, or at the workplace. They are short: at Career Fairs they can be 15 minutes, but at other locations can be up to 60 minutes. Their purpose is to screen candidates for later interviews with a person with the power to make hiring decisions.
- consist of both probing questions to determine your competence in specific skills, and open-ended questions to assess your personality. They will also screen out those whose personalities clearly would not fit in that organization's culture.

In this interview, avoid any responses or behavior that could rule you out!

Second Interviews

- are held at the organization, with the person(s) who have the authority to make a decision to hire. Typically they are a half-day, but they can be a full day, and if so, it would include lunch.
- involves meeting with a supervisor, department head, or manager, or have a perhaps a group interview (see below).
- can sometimes include students if you are seeking a position in education.

You are constantly being evaluated, so if your interview includes eating, it is essential you use good table manners.

Group Interviews

- are where two or more people take turns asking you questions. There may be representatives from different departments present.

Make each member feel very involved in the interview and with all of your responses. Make eye contact with each interviewer, and make them feel important. Sending thank-you notes to each person may be a bonus.

Series Interviews

- consist of consecutive interviews with one or more people in the organization, all in one day. The interviewers may be someone from human resources, the person to whom you will be reporting, two or three people who will be your colleagues in the same department, and someone from a different department.
- usually result in the actual hiring manager making a selection from two preferred candidates.

A key point is that you know in advance that it will be happening so you can get mentally prepared. Try to connect with each person and listen carefully to his or her questions.

Telephone Screening Interviews

- are used when an organization is considering inviting you on site for a full round of interviews.
- can be useful if an employer is hiring out-of-state or if a local organization wants to screen people quickly.

Sell yourself. Let your enthusiasm sparkle so the interviewer will want to meet you: smile when you talk. Tell the person you are very interested in the position and would like an appointment. Be ready for the call with paper and pencil, notebook with questions to ask, and your resume in front of you. If you receive an unexpected call and are not prepared, tactfully ask if you can call back in a few minutes.

Stress Interviews (used to be more common)

- consist of questions and situations designed to put you under duress, to reveal how you will actually handle pressure.
- Example: asking rapid-fire questions so you barely have time to think
- Example: the interviewer says you do not have enough experience, stops talking, and observes your reaction.

The trick is to recognize it and not get flustered or defensive. Say to yourself, "Okay, I know what you're doing, and you're not going to get me angry or defensive." Keep your composure, your smile and your patience. Repeat a statement you want to stand by if challenged. Continue to be polite and appreciative at the end of the interview even if you feel it did not go well.

Behavioral Interviews (can be part of all types) (See also D. Questions)

- involve you telling "stories" to provide evidence that you have the skills required for the position. Each answer requires a *specific* example, and interviewer may not stop until you have provided it. Example: "Talk about a time when you made a sacrifice to achieve a work-related or personal goal."
- require that you recall many experiences quickly, selecting the most appropriate one, and then describing it effectively.

One way to prepare is to think of five to ten experiences that relate to the job description. Review them before a possible behavioral interview (you may not know one is coming until you hear the questions).

F. FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW

Follow up with a thank-you letter reaffirming your interest in the organization and position. Send it the next day. If you interviewed with a number of people, write separate letters to each and refer to something specific about the individual meeting. A typed or written letter sent through regular mail will have a stronger impact than email.

If you have not heard within the time period indicated by the interviewer, call to ask about the status of your candidacy. If, after a second or third interview, you are not offered the position, it is acceptable for you to ask for feedback about your qualifications and their reasons for not hiring you. If they give you this information, it will help you prepare for the next interview.

It is best not to accept a job offer on the spot. Rather, state your interest and appreciation of the offer, and request a few days or perhaps a week. Be sure to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it. Use the job offer to your advantage as you follow up on other applications you have pending. *Once you have accepted a position, your commitment is considered binding.*

Negotiating Salary

- Let the employer bring the topic up
- Salary is usually discussed at the time of the job offer
- Sometimes salary is discussed at other stages in the process: If the topic arises during the early stages, say you would prefer to discuss salary after you have a better understanding of the position
- If forced to give a figure, give a range *or* restate your qualifications for the position and ask the employer what she/he has in mind
- If asked about what you received before and that figure is lower than what you would like, explain why you are worth more for this particular position
- Remember salary is one portion of the compensation package, which includes health benefits, sick leave, retirement, and may include tuition reimbursement. The benefits may or may not be negotiable.

Accepting or Declining a Job Offer

- Consider what the position is worth – including health benefits, insurance, retirement and education benefits
- Consider geographic location and the cost of living in a particular area.
- Look at the fit: organizational culture, opportunities for promotion, professional development, personalities of supervisor and co-workers, management style, and perhaps flexibility in work hours
- If offered a job at a lower salary than expected, you might say that given your qualifications, you were hoping for a salary closer to \$XX,XXX. If you do not get what you want but take the job for other reasons, you can ask that the topic be revisited at your first performance review.
- **If you accept**, if it has not been done, ask the employer to give you an offer in writing, restating the title of your job, salary and start date. *Once you have accepted, stop all interviewing and withdraw any remaining applications.* To continue interviewing is unethical.
- **If you decline**, thank the employer for her/his interest in you and professionally say that the position is not right for you at this time. Follow up with a written letter.

H. SUMMING UP: INTERVIEW CHECKLIST*

- Be certain of the time and place of the interview.
- Arrive for your appointment at least ten minutes early. Do not risk being late, even for unexpected traffic delays.
- Know the name, role, and level of responsibility of each individual with whom you are to meet.
- Take extra resumes, a list of references, samples of your work, and/or academic transcripts in a professional folder or briefcase.
- If the interviewer offers his or her hand, return the handshake with a firm handgrip. If your hands tend to be moist, take a towel to dry them before entering the room.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- As you wait to be called in, mentally imagine yourself handling questions with ease and take deep breaths to relax.
- Wait for the interviewer to sit or offer you a chair. If there are several chairs, choose one in which you can directly face the interviewer. If necessary, re-position your chair so you can establish rapport but do not sit so close that you invade the interviewer's space.
- Maintain eye contact without staring. If more than one interviewer, make your primary response to the person who asked the question, but include the others as well.
- Body language is important. Posture should be erect, relaxed, and open. Use your hands in a natural way that expresses animation, excitement, and interest. Facial expressions should convey your sincerity, and voice tone should be warm, well modulated, and relaxed.
- Smile. Enjoy the experience. You can use humor to show good perspective on the situation, but stay appropriate! Not all people share the same type of humor. The interviewer might think you are serious.
- Listen to each question and answer it: Do not ramble or include trivia in your responses. Answer in complete sentences and avoid use of slang. If you need clarification of a question, ask for it.
- Have a notepad in front of you. If an interviewer asks a multi-part question, you can take brief notes to be sure that you are answering it thoroughly. You may also want to take down information about the position.
- The interviewer controls the flow of the conversation, but you control the content. Tactfully lead the conversation to highlight your strengths.
- If this is a first interview, do not ask about salary.
- Use specific, concrete examples and refer to your accomplishments and strengths.
- Get a business card from everyone you meet.
- Send a thank-you letter the next day!

*To make an appointment to have your resume reviewed or to do a mock interview, contact Susan Hyde-Wick, Career Counselor at UConn Waterbury: susan.hyde-wick@uconn.edu or make an appointment through advapp: www.advapp.uconn.edu or call her at 203-236-9913.

