

## **Thriving in the Spotlight: *The Interview***

Congratulations! You've landed an interview. Now, follow these steps to help prepare.

### **Research the organization and its industry.**

- ✓ Be sure to read any literature the company has sent the Career & Leadership Development office. This is the type of information that you will want to know:
  - Key people in the organization
  - Major products or services
  - General business strategies & values
  - Size in terms of sales & employees
  - Locations
  - Internal organization or structure
  - Major competitors
  - View of the organization by clients, suppliers, and competition
  - Target markets
  - Plans for growth
  - Key challenges
  - Latest news reports on the organization
  - Local/national news that affects the company
- ✓ Learn about the organization's industry or fields through books and journals available in the Career & Leadership Development office and duPont Library.
- ✓ Use First Search, the internet, and other references to research the organization. The duPont librarians can help you identify good resources.
- ✓ Read newspapers and magazines, such as the *Wall Street Journal*, to stay abreast of current issues.
- ✓ Call the organization itself to gain more specific information you need (e.g. annual report, recruiting brochures, press releases.)
- ✓ Based on your research, develop a list of thoughtful, relevant questions that you will want to ask the recruiter/employer.

### **Research the position.**

- ✓ Read any job description provided by the organization.
- ✓ Speak with anyone you know who works for the organization and can tell you about the position.

### **Review your resume and personal history (See Personal History & Inventory page 5-8).**

- ✓ Know your resume and be ready to discuss any part of it and its relevance.
- ✓ Consider your strengths and weaknesses, and be able to discuss them.
- ✓ Think about how well your skills and interests match the position.
- ✓ Select the skills to emphasize. Recall times when you have demonstrated these skills.

### **Practice and polish your interviewing skills.**

- ✓ Think through and prepare answers for commonly-asked interview questions.
- ✓ Attend an interview workshop offered by the Career & Leadership Development office. If no workshops are scheduled when you need one, request an interview workshop prior to your interview or make an appointment to talk with a Career & Leadership Development staff member.
- ✓ Ask a friend to ask you interview questions or schedule a practice interview with a Career & Leadership Development staff member.
- ✓ Read up on interviewing strategies. Books and journals are readily available in the duPont and the Career & Leadership Development libraries if you need additional help, advice, or information.

### **Plan for a strong first impression.**

- ✓ Find out the name of the interviewer in advance so that you can greet him/her by name.
- ✓ Appearances count! Wear the most professional outfit you might wear if you had the job. For banks and corporations, suits are appropriate. If you do not have a suit, it may be time to invest in one or borrow one from a friend who is your size.
- ✓ Plan to be early for your interview.
- ✓ Practice a strong handshake and a winning smile. Wash and thoroughly dry your hands before the interview.

### **Attend any information sessions scheduled by the company.**

- ✓ Use this as an opportunity to make a strong first impression.
- ✓ Be early and enthusiastic. Introduce yourself to the recruiter.
- ✓ Appearances still count! While you are not expected to be as formally dressed as you will be for your interview, you do not want to appear overly casual.
- ✓ Complete your research before this session and ask questions.

### **Follow up.**

- ✓ Send a thank-you letter (typically handwritten) to the interviewer the next day. Use the letter to express your appreciation and interest, and to jog the interviewer's memory of your interview. You may also mention pertinent information that you did not discuss in the interview.

### What next?

- ✓ Second interviews are a typical next step. Because some recruiters will call with this invitation, make sure that your voice message will not embarrass you.
- ✓ Second interviews tend to be more intense than initial interviews and may last up to a full day. You may meet with several people individually or in small groups. You may also be asked to complete some type of personality or skills test. Often, the interview day will include meals – remember they are still evaluating you.
- ✓ Relax! Though preparation is important, you now know that the company is sincerely interested in you.
- ✓ Do more in-depth research on the organization. Come prepared with questions that will help you determine if you would like to work for this organization.
- ✓ Follow up your interview with individual thank-you letters to each person with whom you spoke. \*\*\* Note: as you meet people, ask for their business cards. \*\*\*

### Why write a thank-you letter?

Thank-you letters are often the last key to getting that job offer you want. They remind employers of your interview, emphasize your interest in a job, and demonstrate your knowledge of business etiquette.

### How do I write a thank-you letter?

A thank-you letter can be typed or handwritten – just be certain that it contains NO ERRORS of any sort (spelling, grammar, syntax, etc.) Use plain stationery. Make your letter clear, concise and legible. Use it as an opportunity to refer to parts of the interview. Express your interest again and re-highlight your talents. Add in any vital information that you did not mention in your interview. Write and mail your letter within a day after your interview. A basic format follows.

## Sample Format For A Thank-You Note

Your Street Address  
City, State, and Zip Code

Date of Letter

Mr./Ms./Dr. First and Last Name  
Position Title  
Company Name  
Street Address  
City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. Last Name,

I enjoyed meeting with you OR I appreciated the opportunity to interview for such-and-such. (1-2 sentences)

I liked \_\_\_ about your company/field. I believe that I can contribute in this/that way. (2-3 sentences)

If you need any more information in evaluating my candidacy, please do not hesitate to call me at\_\_\_\_. (1-2 sentences)

Sincerely,

*(sign here in ink)*

Your Name

## Interview Preparation: Personal History

### Why review my personal history?

Completing this personal history worksheet is a good way to review your resume and take some time to think through your accomplishments in greater depth.

#### 1. EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION (for each employer)

Employer name & address:

Dates of employment: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Salary:

Supervisor's name & title:

Skills utilized:

Accomplishments/honors/awards:

References:

#### 2. VOLUNTEER INFORMATION (for each volunteer organization)

Organization name & address:

Dates of activity: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's name & title:

Duties:

Skills utilized:

Accomplishments/honors/awards:

**3. HIGH SCHOOL INFORMATION**

School name & address:

Years attended: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

GPA/Class rank:

Honors:

**4. COLLEGE INFORMATION:**

College name & address:

Years attended: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Degree earned:

Major:

Minor:

Honors:

Important courses:

**5. ACTIVITIES INFORMATION (for each activity):**

Club/activity: \_\_\_\_\_ Office(s) held: \_\_\_\_\_

Duties/responsibilities/accomplishments:

**6. LANGUAGE INFORMATION (for each):**

Language:

Read: \_\_\_\_\_ Write: \_\_\_\_\_ Converse: \_\_\_\_\_

Background (number of years studied, travel, etc.)

**7. COMPUTER SKILLS (for each):**

Software: \_\_\_\_\_ How you used it:: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of proficiency:

## Interview Preparation: Personal Inventory

### Why bother completing this inventory?

The better you know yourself, the better you can convince a prospective employer when you're on the spot that you are right for the job. You will not have a chance to formulate these thoughts for the first time *during* the interview. Be sure to complete questions 7 and 8.

1. What has been your most meaningful achievement?
2. What mistakes have you made? Why did they occur? What did you learn from them and what have you done to keep similar things from occurring again?
3. How well do you interact with authority figures (such as bosses, teachers, parents)? What specific examples demonstrate how well you work with them?
4. What are your favorite games and sports? Think about the way you play these games and what that says about you. Are you overly competitive? Do you give up too easily? Are you a good loser – or a bad winner? Do you rise to a challenge or back away from it?
5. What kinds of people are your friends? Do you associate only with people who are very similar to you? Do you enjoy differences in others – or merely tolerate them? What are some things that have caused you to end friendships? What does this say about you?
6. If you were to ask a group of friends and acquaintances to describe you, what adjectives would they use? List all of them – the good and the bad. Why would people describe you in this way? Are there specific behaviors, skills, achievements or failures that seem to identify you in the eyes of others? What are they?

7. Now make a short list of:

Strongest skills/specific situations in which you demonstrated these skills:

Greatest areas of knowledge/specific situations in which you demonstrated these areas of knowledge:

Greatest personality strengths/specific situations in which you demonstrated these strengths:

Things you do best:

Key accomplishments:

8. Now transform your best features into benefits for your prospective company.

What in my personal inventory will convince this employer that I deserve the position?

What are strengths, achievements, skills and areas of knowledge that make me most qualified for this position? What in my background separates me from the herd of other applicants?

Which of my weaknesses should I admit to when asked? How will I explain the ways I've improved?



## Advice to Help You During the Interview

### Understand the nature of the job interview.

- ✓ Your job interview is an experience in selling. YOUR skills and attributes are the products, and the salesperson is you. To motivate the employer to offer you a job, you must be prepared to point out all the features and benefits of hiring you. Be honest! The entire interview will hinge on how well you know and can speak about yourself and your experiences.
- ✓ Beyond the sales presentation, remember that you are trying to learn about the organization, too. Regard the interview as an opportunity to determine whether you are suited for the work the organization is proposing.

### Follow these hints for the interview itself.

- ✓ Interviewers are generally looking for employees with enthusiasm, honesty, dedication and the ability to work with and relate to people. Use this interview as an opportunity to exhibit or talk about these qualities. Above all, **BE ENTHUSIASTIC and POSITIVE!**
- ✓ When an interviewer asks you a question, **listen** to the question and **answer the question asked**. Before you speak, consider why the interviewer is asking that question. What does the interviewer hope to learn? Your response should address this.
- ✓ Interviewers may ask you to give specific examples of your past experiences and behavior. Answer questions with honesty and **specificity**, using **examples** from your experience whenever applicable. Do not be modest about the things that you have accomplished. The time you spend before your interview completing your personal history and inventory will be well worth the investment.
- ✓ If you need to do so, **pause** before answering or **ask the interviewer to clarify** the question. Answering the question that an interviewer asks demonstrates that you want to give him the information he is seeking. Pausing or asking the interviewers for clarification when necessary will not only allow you to provide the interviewer the information he seeks, but it can also help an interviewer to assess your communication skills.
- ✓ **Ask questions.** You will be informing your interviewers about yourself, but learn something about them, too. You may ask questions about the company's annual report, company profile, job description and other public information. Also, ask your interviewer questions about non-confidential aspects of their work, including what they like best working for the company or what work experiences they have learned from the most. Do not ask about salary information during the first interview. If your questions show interest in the company and the interviewer, you will make a better impression than if you focus only on yourself. If your questions also demonstrate that you have researched the organization, the interviewer will consider you as a more serious candidate.
- ✓ Pay attention to body language. Try not to fidget. Let your posture and eye contact convey interest. Pay attention to the interviewer's body language, which may give clues as to how you respond.

## Commonly Asked Interview Questions

Review this list of commonly asked interview questions and plan how you would answer each. Many of these questions *will be asked*, in one form or another.

1. So, tell me a little about yourself?
2. What are your strengths as an employee?
3. Why should I consider you a strong applicant for this position?
4. What are your biggest weaknesses as an employee?
5. What do you plan to do to correct those weaknesses?
6. What are the biggest failures you've had during your career?
7. What have you done to make sure they won't occur again?
8. What are the skills you need to develop to advance your career?
9. What do your supervisors tend to criticize about your performance?
10. Tell me about the worst/best boss you ever had?
11. Looking back on the experience now, do you think there was anything you could have done to improve your relationship with that one bad boss?
12. Tell me about a time when you were proud of your decision-making skills. What did you do in creating the solution to that particular problem? \*
13. Would you describe yourself as a risk taker or someone who plays it safe?
14. If you could start your career all over again, what would you do differently?
15. What interests you most about this position? This company?
16. What have you heard about our company that you don't like?
17. What aspect of the job I have described appeals to you the least?
18. Describe a situation on your last job when you had to handle conflict or problems with co-workers? \*
19. If you could change one thing about your personality with a snap of your fingers, what would it be? Why?
20. Describe your best friend. How are you similar or dissimilar?

21. Say your supervisor left an assignment in your “inbox” and then left town for a week. You can’t reach him and do not fully understand the assignment. What would you do? \*
22. Your supervisor tells you to do something in a way you know is dead wrong. What would you do? \*
23. How will you handle the least interesting or least pleasant tasks of this job? \*
24. What extracurricular activities were you involved in? What made you choose those? Which of them did you enjoy the most and why?
25. What led you to select your major? Minor?
26. Which of your courses did you like the most? Least?
27. If you were to start college over again tomorrow, what are the courses you would take and why?
28. What are your most memorable experiences from college?
29. What did you learn from (or why do I not see any) internships on your resume?
30. In what courses did you get your worst grades? Why? How do you think that will affect your performance in this job?
31. How are you today? Did you have any trouble finding us?
32. Do you know much about our company?
33. What is the last book you read? Movie you saw?
34. This is a Christian (or Jewish or Muslim or whatever) company. Do you think you would be happy working here?
35. What sort of salary are you looking for?
36. What other jobs are you applying for?
37. Do you have any questions? \*\*

\* These are the typical types of questions asked in a **behavioral interview**. They are intended to get you to describe a specific example of a skill or behavior in the recent past. Interviewers who conduct behavioral interviews will prod you for more details about this example to try to see how you will react to similar settings in the future.

\*\* Almost every interview includes this question. Be prepared!