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INTRODUCTION

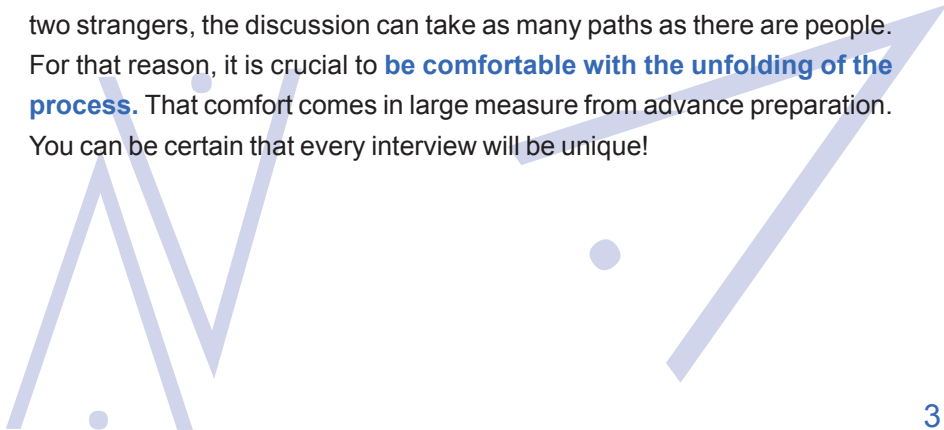
First, a word about interviews in general. Remember that an interviewer needs to choose the right candidate as much as you need to find the right employer for your needs. It helps to think of the process as one where both parties are hoping for a positive outcome.

There are a number of concrete steps you can take to increase the probability that a job interview will be successful—i.e., that you will receive an offer or will be invited to return for additional interviews. This booklet introduces those steps and gives other resources for further research/learning/practice.

Throughout your career you will be interviewed by some people who are skilled interviewers and by others who are not. **There is no one “right” way to interview**, and no matter what the format, it is your responsibility to do the best you can in each situation.

Being well prepared will increase your self-confidence, which in turn will improve your performance in the interview.

Because interviewing is most often an unrehearsed conversation between two strangers, the discussion can take as many paths as there are people. For that reason, it is crucial to **be comfortable with the unfolding of the process**. That comfort comes in large measure from advance preparation. You can be certain that every interview will be unique!



PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

It is difficult to overemphasize **the importance of being well prepared** for a job interview. Your degree of preparation speaks volumes about your interest level, and the way you will work at assigned responsibilities. In addition to increasing your confidence, solid preparation will provide you with the foundation that will allow you to give articulate answers and ask pertinent questions.

To make the best case for your candidacy for a particular job, you need to **be prepared with information about yourself AND about the job, organization, and field**. It is virtually impossible to make a case for a match if you are informed about only one side of the equation.

As the person being interviewed, **you are responsible** for communicating to the employer what she needs to know in order to recognize the excellence of your candidacy. This means that **you need to be both an advocate for yourself and a translator for the employer**. You need to clearly articulate how your interests, skills, education, and experience match the requirements for the position for which you are being interviewed.

RESEARCHING YOURSELF: DEVELOPING THE STORY YOU WANT TO TELL

Begin to think about yourself as a job candidate by asking yourself a series of questions:

- What are my skills and strengths? ●
- What are my accomplishments? ●
- What motivates me to do my best work? ●
- In which environments do I thrive? ●
- What are my values? ●
- What are the most important things an employer needs to know about me? ●

The answers to these questions will inform your responses to questions you are likely to be asked in an interview and will help you to decide what you need to communicate to the interviewer.



DON'T SKIP AN IMPORTANT STEP: SELF-ASSESSMENT

You have already done much of the preparation early on in the career development process when you engaged in self-assessment. If you skipped this very important step, it's not too late!

Take a look at www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/basics/process/selfassess.htm or make an appointment to meet with a counselor.

Use your resume as a tool to help you formulate your answers to the questions on page 4. Identify the relevant characteristics of each of the experiences you have included in your resume and communicate to the interviewer how these experiences have prepared you for the position at hand.

You can use your school activities:

For instance, on your resume you said you were involved in a dance company on campus – you may want to use this experience to illustrate your discipline, your creativity, your ability to be either part of a team or to perform independently. Were you the business manager? This could show your leadership capabilities as well as an ability to prioritize many tasks.

Or volunteer work:

If your resume indicated that you tutored children in an afterschool program, does this demonstrate that you are a particularly effective communicator? Are you someone who can create a trusting relationship, listen to and understand the needs of another, and then create an effective response that they will not only understand, but value or learn from?

Or summer internships or positions:

Can you utilize this experience to demonstrate specific knowledge or a general understanding of the culture of a particular organization or environment? Does this experience demonstrate that you can think creatively and that you possess the drive to arrive at the solution to a complex problem?

Your resume may also **document an important choice** you made that you can elaborate on or explain in your interview. If it mentions a leave of absence from Harvard or a transfer here from another institution, you may want to discuss the factors and process you used to make this decision.

Other choices deserve explanation too, such as your decision to reprioritize your efforts by dropping a sport or other co-curricular activity, or the choice to write a senior thesis. Think about how you might use these choices to demonstrate to an interviewer how you make and then live with your decisions: How much of a risk taker are you? How do you manage the situation if you later discover that you might have chosen unwisely? Do you learn from your experiences?

Also, notice **when your resume shows trends, development, and increased responsibility.**

Finally, don't be afraid to **acknowledge your weaknesses** and find where they appear on your resume. Remember that everyone has something that they would prefer not to discuss. A good interviewer will always find this topic and raise it. So, in your preparation you need to look critically, acknowledge the bumps and bruises, and be prepared to talk about those weaknesses assertively, positively, and in the construct of lessons learned. Explain how you overcame challenges.

Remember: Most likely, interviewers will begin by asking questions directly from your resume.

If you have thought carefully about what to include in your resume and know what you would like each of your experiences to say about you, you are off to a good start. Studying your resume is your best tool for preparation!

RESEARCHING THE EMPLOYER: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EQUATION

At this stage of the employment process, it is likely that you have researched the industry or field, and you have a clear understanding of the position for which you are being considered. If not, take the time to do so now. These are the building blocks to understanding the opportunity to which you are applying.



Complete your preparation by finding out as much as you can about the specific employer, so that you can both talk knowledgably about where your qualifications intersect with the employer's needs and convey genuine enthusiasm about the opportunity at hand. **You need to be able to explain why you want to do *this* job and why you have chosen *this* employer, rather than the others in the field.** A good interviewer will quickly find out that you know little or nothing about the organization when you can't explain why exactly you want to work *there*. An interview is also your opportunity to become a person, not just a piece of paper – make the most of it.

So how do you find out about “*there*”? You gather as much information as you can from as many reliable sources as you can find.

Your sources can be as varied as

- formal print or electronic publications,
- employer-hosted information sessions,
- conversations with employer representatives at career fairs or panels,
- observations you have made during an internship or site visit.

For information on informational interviewing, consult the OCS publication, *Building a Job Search Toolkit: Informational Interviewing*.

With so many possible sources for employer information, it is helpful to have a general strategy in place to structure your approach. Think of your sources as similar to those you utilize in conducting research for your coursework: **two main categories of primary and secondary sources.**

Examples of Primary Sources:

Abbott Laboratories Global Citizen Report

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation web site:
www.gatesfoundation.org

Education Development Center web site:
http://main.edc.org

Ford Foundation Report

IBM Journal of Research & Development

The United States Government Manual

Employer primary sources would be those produced by the employer. They would include the organization's web site, annual and other reports, promotional materials, prospectuses, information presented at an information session or other employer-hosted event, newsletters, etc. Make sure that you consult these primary sources first, as they will give you an understanding of an employer's priorities, values, and culture, and of how the employer perceives itself.

Examples of Secondary Sources:

Advertising Age

ARTNews

Fortune

Non-Profit Times

Public Interest Profiles
(Washington, DC: Foundation for Public Affairs, 2001)

The Wall Street Journal

Secondary sources might take the form of articles about the employer in the popular press or in trade and professional journals. They could also consist of chapters in — or even entire — books about a field or industry. These sources can provide an external view of an organization's leaders, culture, goals, strategies, products, services, reputation, and effectiveness.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you have researched yourself and the specific organization and position for which you are interviewing, you are ready to think about the most effective way to describe your experiences and assets in language that the employer will recognize – **using the vocabulary of the field.**

Look closely at the **specific job requirements** of the position as described in the ad, job description, information session, or informational interview. Use these requirements to create an outline of speaking points for your interview. Match your experiences to these points with **concrete examples** that illustrate your candidacy. When discussing your skills, try whenever possible to use the same language as the organization uses.

What Interviewers Say:

“My sense is that students are more focused on a resume item or just getting a job — I think it would be useful for them to think about the “FIT” with the people, the firm, mentors, skills learned, and where they might go with the experience.”

For example, you know that the three most critical assets the employer seeks are communication skills, an aptitude for analytical problem-solving, and the ability to be self-directed. You can begin by talking about your experience at the small computer shop last summer where you noticed that there was no mechanism for informing existing customers about system upgrades and enhancements. You designed a simple database to track customer purchases in order to alert them to new products, increasing sales by 20% by encouraging this repeat business.

It is safe to say that **for each half hour you will be with an interviewer, you should anticipate spending at least an hour preparing.** Remember the preparation for each interview is like preparing for a formal presentation for an audience; don't make the mistake of believing that your improvisational skills are enough. You want to lead the conversation through your preparation and save your “gift for thinking on your feet” to react effectively when the interviewer throws you an unexpected question.

If you are having trouble identifying skills and assets that match a job description, you might consider these options:

Take a look at old letters of recommendation that have been written for you; your recommenders are telling at least part of the tale you hope to tell.

Ask current mentors or supervisors to provide you with an assessment of your abilities and skills as they relate to the role you play with them.

Ask fellow students in organizations to which you belong what they perceive to be your strengths and assets; often they know how others value you.

Finally, ask friends or roommates — they are often better at describing you than they are at describing themselves. Return the favor and you both might gain from the experience.

After all of this preparation you should be able to walk into an interview confident that if the interviewer were to say, “You have thirty minutes in which to tell me what I need to know in order to evaluate you as a candidate,” you would be ready.

You would be able to organize the thirty minutes; you would have the order of priority in which you wanted to talk about your experiences and assets; you would know which examples to use to demonstrate your assets; and you would know which questions to ask in order to evaluate this particular opportunity.

What Students Say:

“You need to be modest but also need to sell yourself — it’s ok to admit you’re good at something.”

PRACTICE. PRACTICE.
PRACTICE.

Look for opportunities to practice your interviewing skills: role play with roommates, friends, tutors, family — even in front of a mirror. The more experience you have with verbalizing your thoughts, the more effective and polished your presentation will be.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Most interviewers will admit (and research supports) that they **developed a strong sense of a candidate within the initial stages of the interview**. It is important to get off to a good start. What are the important “first impression” indicators? A firm handshake, sustained eye contact, a warm smile, good posture, and introducing yourself in a relaxed and confident manner.

Before you can make a first impression, you must **arrive on time**. If it means getting somewhere an hour early because you are uncertain about the traffic, parking availability, or public transportation connections, do it! You can always find a coffee shop or lobby in which to wait and review your thoughts. You’ll want to arrive at the location of your interview about 10 minutes ahead of your scheduled appointment. Use that time to observe your surroundings, and possibly talk to the receptionist or other people who might be in the waiting area.

Be careful about scheduling! Particularly if you are participating in the On-Campus Recruiting Program, it will be important to arrange interviews around your class schedule or other responsibilities. Avoid scheduling interviews back-to-back, so that you have buffer-zones in your schedule to allow for delayed or overlong interviews. You will not want to have to cut one interview short in order to make the next, or to arrive late at the second one!

What Students Say:

“The key is researching a company really well so you can ask good questions.”

Although you’ve heard it before, a few basics about presentation bear repeating. **A well-groomed, professional appearance is essential**. Anything else will detract from the best possible presentation you can make. Decide what to wear well before the day of your interview, allowing time for dry cleaning or pressing as necessary. If your outfit is new, wear it once before your first interview. Make sure that all buttons and zippers work. You don’t want to give your clothes a second thought as you go to the interview. You *do* want to feel comfortable and confident in whatever you choose to wear.

A good way to determine suitable attire is to **look at what people typically wear** in the organization or industry for which you are interviewing. Both men and women should generally plan to wear a fairly conservative suit in a conservative color. In some creative fields you may have more leeway in terms of formal vs. casual attire, but it is always safer to err on the conservative side. Long hair should be kept in place with understated barrettes, a headband, or combs, unless your style is one that stays put. Very long hair should be pulled back. In any case, leave at home the wild ties, attention-grabbing jewelry, strong scents, and gum.



You should **always bring along extra copies of your resume, something to write on, and something with which to write.** An expensive portfolio is not necessary—a clean folder and pad of paper will suffice. You may also want to consider bringing additional materials that you have produced and that you think would support your candidacy. These might include writing samples, published articles, spreadsheets, software programs, photos, and videos. Writing samples are the most common item for people (particularly students and recent graduates) to bring to an interview. If you have questions about something else, ask an OCS counselor. If possible, you should be willing to leave anything you bring, so make sure you have good-quality, clean copies.

SHOW TIME

The age-old advice to “be yourself” is still the best general thought to keep in mind as you prepare for an interview. People can get into all kinds of trouble trying to be someone they are not. If you obtain a job offer by creating a presence you think will work, but that you cannot sustain, it will be a shock for both you and your employer when the real you is revealed.

When you think about being yourself, however, **concentrate on being your “best self”—the one you and the employer will be excited about.** This thought extends from the suit you wear to the examples from your past that you choose to highlight. An interview is a brief period of time in which to make an impression. You want yours to be a *positive* one. Present the highs and not the lows, the enthusiasm and not the doubt.

It is not unusual for an interviewer to begin an interview with a bit of chit-chat or small talk. Don't think of this as a waste of time or an unimportant part of the interview. It is both an opportunity for you to establish rapport with the interviewer and a test of your social and interpersonal skills.

If you are asked to describe a failure, a weakness, or a negative experience, **try to finish your response on an upbeat note.** You can do this by mentioning a lesson learned, how you have grown from a difficult experience, or what you are doing to improve a weakness. You can also discuss a failure that you later turned into a success or a weakness that sometimes works as a strength for you. This approach will communicate that you are a positive and forward-thinking person. It will model the behavior the employer can expect in the future when you make a mistake. If you must bring up something negative, be brief, and return the conversation to a positive subject as soon as you are able.

Among the most tempting negative subjects are previous bosses and boring tasks. While your assessment may be quite true and perfectly justified, **choose something else to talk about.** You don't want to give the impression that you are a negative person. You may leave someone with the mistaken impression that you might speak about a future manager in the same way or that you are unwilling to dig in and do the mundane part of a job.

If you have done your preparation you will have three or four key points in mind that you make sure to discuss in the interview. These might be personal characteristics, skills you have learned, or experiences that you have had, that would help show that you could perform well in the job.



You will also have in mind specific examples and anecdotes from your past to illustrate important points about yourself. Generalities are usually weaker than specifics in trying to prove a point. For example, instead of saying only that you can see a

project through from start to finish, elaborate by describing how you had an idea for a particular magazine and led the effort to have it published. Instead of stating you have strong sales skills, describe how you sold more t-shirts than anyone on your softball team had ever sold.

What Interviewers Say:

“No need to wear a Gordon Gecko power suit, but a suit and tie (or equivalent) is still expected!”

A prospective employer’s impression of you will be considerably enhanced if a

genuine air of enthusiasm accompanies your responses. If you are one of a group of qualified

candidates who all have similar experience in the field, enthusiasm often is the deciding factor. If you are not enthusiastic about a position, it will be difficult to feign interest in the interview. If you are sincerely enthusiastic, don’t be afraid to communicate it.

When reviewing your resume and thinking about your past, **focus on stories that demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, creativity, initiative, leadership, and responsibility.** These are characteristics that most employers value in entry-level employees. You will also want to give examples that show progress, growth, and achievement. Don’t overlook the importance of having good manners, common sense, and a sense of humor.

Feel free to **take time to think** before you answer an interview question. Five or ten seconds may seem like an eternity, but it is perfectly acceptable to take that time before beginning to speak. In fact, taking a few moments is preferable to beginning an aimless answer or blurting out something you later wish you hadn’t said. If you are unsure about the meaning of a question or if you need time to think or to compose yourself, repeat the question aloud or ask the interviewer for clarification.

If you have prepared for your interview, there is only a slight chance that you will be completely surprised by a question posed to you. Of course, the possibility exists, and some interviewers may indeed try to shock you, but those experiences are few and far between. If that happens, try to remain calm and poised; it may just be a test of your composure.

You may have to say “I don’t know” in an interview if you don’t have the information requested at hand or if you simply don’t know the answer to a question. If it is appropriate, offer to find out and get back to the interviewer later in the day or early the next day. Otherwise, be honest; some questions are designed to stump you, and it is riskier to make up an answer than to tell the truth.

If you don’t answer a question exactly the way you wanted, don’t get hung up on it. You can always come back to something later when the employer asks if you have any questions. Use that time to say something such as, “I would like to rephrase or elaborate my answer to a previous question...”

If you are being interviewed by more than one person, **be sure to address all of the people in the room** when you are answering questions. Even if one person is doing most of the talking, or if interviewers are alternating questions, it is polite and professional to maintain eye contact with each person.

Communicating information about yourself is your responsibility. It is not up to the interviewer to drag it out of you. The interviewer will often signal the end of the interview by asking if you have any questions. If you feel you haven’t discussed some key points, take the initiative and say, “Before I ask my first question, there are a couple of additional points I would like to mention, if we have the time.”

It is natural to feel nervous before an interview. Your goal is to **eliminate unnecessary nervousness by being well prepared**. A good night’s sleep, a healthy breakfast, and plenty of travel time can also have a soothing effect on your nerves. Remember, the ideal is to be comfortable with the unfolding of the process. If you can truly enjoy the interview, you will communicate self-assurance and positive energy.

Take a look at www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu/basics/toolkit/interviewing or make an appointment to meet with a counselor.

WHAT TYPES OF QUESTIONS MIGHT YOU EXPECT?

1. Behavioral or Situational Questions:

In order to hear more than generalities from a candidate, many interviewers ask questions about specific experiences from your past. Examples are: “Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative”; “Describe an example of your leadership ability”; “Tell me about an experience that you have had working on a team when the group did not get along—how did you respond and what role did you play on the team?” Interviewers will assume that your answers to these questions will reveal interesting information about you and may predict your behavior in future situations.

2. Role Play Questions:

Some interviewers like to ask you to role play, posing a question such as “Imagine that you were the Director of Marketing and the CEO presented the following problem to you; how would you handle it?” The variations are endless. Remember to think for a moment before you begin to answer.

3. Industry- or Field-specific Questions:

Even for entry-level positions, some interviewers will want to get a sense of how much you know about the industry or field. For example, they might ask a question like: “Can you explain the difference between an investment bank and a commercial bank?” or “Tell me what you know about Nineteenth Century American landscape artists.”

4. Current Events Questions:

Sometimes in an effort to be conversational or to actually gain information about your political views, an interviewer will ask for your opinion on an upcoming election or a current event of particular interest. Be wary of expressing strong political opinions when you don't know about the political culture of the organization or the views of the person interviewing you. It is best to be brief and to say something nonpartisan. Of course, if you are interviewing for a political position, for example with the Democratic or Republican National Committees, they may want to confirm that your views are in line with those of their party. In that case, you may well have an in-depth political discussion.

5. Illegal Questions:

Most employers know that, except in some very specific and narrowly defined cases, it is illegal to ask about age, ethnic background, national origin, marital status, family planning, or sexual, religious or political preference. If this type of question does come up, try to think about why the question was asked and

<p>What exactly can an employer legally ask?</p>	<p>An employer may inquire into some aspects of a candidate's background, but only in very specific ways. For instance, "Are you authorized to work in the United States?", "Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job?", "Are you over the age of 18?"</p>
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respond directly to that concern without actually answering the question. For example, if you are asked if you plan to marry or how many children you plan to have, you may choose to answer, "If you are concerned about my ability to travel, I can assure you that my family responsibilities will not interfere with my ability to do the traveling that is necessary for this position." If you think that your answer will help you, you may choose to answer the question directly. Of course, you can refuse to answer the question, but this approach is likely to jeopardize your candidacy. However you choose to handle the situation, though, you should take the incident into account when evaluating the organization. Also, let an OCS counselor know about it.

6. Case questions:

Generally asked by consulting firms, case questions are discussed in detail in several of the books on interviewing in the OCS library. See sections A and N.

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

For many, the question "Do you have any questions for me?" is one of the most feared. Again, preparation is the key to reducing that fear. A list of sample questions in the appendix is by no means exhaustive. You could conceivably come up with an entirely original list of excellent questions very specific to an employer or field.

The first part is easy—you **should always have a couple of questions to ask**. Having none would communicate lack of interest. Furthermore, it is not an entirely innocent question from an interviewer. Usually it is another way for him or her to measure your interest in the organization, knowledge of the field, maturity, professionalism, and communication skills.

In order to make sure that you have a couple of excellent questions to ask, you must prepare more than two! An interviewer may answer some of your questions during the course of the conversation, and you don't want to be caught short. In order to prevent a last-minute "blank," you may want to write out a list of at least five to bring with you to the interview. Be sure to list your top questions first. If, however, despite your best efforts, you are caught with no questions at this stage of the interview, consider telling the interviewer what your questions were and explain that they were answered in the course of the interview.

It sounds obvious, but you should ask questions to which you want to know the answers. Otherwise, your questions may sound canned or the interviewer may feel that you are simply going through the motions.

Ask questions to things that came up during the interview. This shows you were listening and that you value the employer's opinion.

A general guideline to follow is to **ask broad questions first and then move to the more specific**. For example, ask a question about a new division within or the changing mission of the organization before asking about the specific responsibilities of the open position or the training provided.

It is very important to **consider who will be answering your questions**. You obviously won't want to ask all of the same questions of the CEO and a human resources representative. Think about asking someone higher up in the organization about the group's strategy or future plans or overall mission. If you are talking to someone whose responsibilities are closer to those of the position in question, ask more about a typical day and common challenges. Make sure you know who the interviewer is within the organization. This will help you ask appropriate questions. Another general hint for formulating questions is to bring up a current event, piece of proposed legislation, or demographic trend, and ask about the impact on that particular organization's strategy, its operations in a certain part of the world, or in the case of a business, its competitors.

It is best not to ask about salary, vacation, and benefits until you are offered the job. There will be time for detailed questions and negotiation later in the process if you receive an offer. Concentrate on asking questions that will help you to learn more about the responsibilities of the position and the culture of the organization.

INTERVIEWS DURING A MEAL

It is rare that a first interview will take place during a meal; second interviews sometimes involve lunch or dinner. In any case, if you are having a discussion in an office, which then continues over a meal, remember that you are being “interviewed” in both settings. What you say and do will be under review until you say goodbye.

A few guidelines will help to make the meal less stressful. If you have questions about table manners, brush up with an etiquette book. **Order something that is easy to eat**—stay away from items such as shish kebab, french onion soup, and spaghetti or linguine. Beware of finger food. You will want to be able to eat small bites of your food without dropping or spilling anything.



What Interviewers Say:

“Everyone should have a couple of good questions ready.”

Follow the lead of your host(s) regarding which courses and generally which items to order. **You may want to ask, “What do you recommend here?”** so that you will have an idea of what they are likely to order. Order items within the same price range or lower, and never order the most expensive item on the menu. If others are ordering an appetizer and an entrée, you should do the same. If no one orders dessert, you should refrain.

It is almost always unwise to drink alcohol in an interview setting. If you are at a group dinner or a cocktail reception where wine is served *and* your hosts are having a glass, you can have a glass to be sociable, but don’t drink all of it. Even a small amount of alcohol can impair your judgment.

Be prepared to ask a few questions during the meal, or you may end up with a full plate of food when others are ready for coffee. A meal may be a good time to ask your interviewer(s) about his or her career path(s).

INTERVIEWS OVER THE TELEPHONE OR IN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OR SETTINGS

Most interviews will take place either in an office setting or over a meal in a restaurant. On rare occasions, however, you may find yourself being interviewed in another venue. For instance, your interviewer may have been called out of town, and your interview is over the phone. Or you may be invited to interview with a very busy literary agent on her way to the airport because that is the only time she will have to see you before embarking on a month-long business trip. Interviews have even been known to take place (sometimes unexpectedly) in hotel lobbies, on airplanes, in elevators, on sound stages, or at athletic or cultural events.

No matter how or where your interview is conducted, you should still have the same goal: **to communicate to the interviewer that you are the best candidate for the position for which you are being interviewed.** If the interview has been scheduled in advance, you should prepare as carefully as you would for a formal “sit down” in someone’s office.

Treat a telephone interview much as you would a face-to-face encounter. Eliminate any distractions from your immediate environment (desk toys, newspaper clippings, your shopping list). Dress professionally and maintain good posture. The one bonus to a telephone interview is that you can prearrange notes to prompt you and to keep you on track, but only if you can refer to them unobtrusively. You do not want the person on the other end of the line to hear you shuffling papers in the background!

If what you thought would be a “social” visit suddenly morphs into an interview, think about how your experience and skills would fit the opportunity at hand. Your ability to communicate your abilities and enthusiasm in less than optimal conditions could work in your favor, especially if the position is in an industry or field requiring the ability to multi-task and to “think on your feet”. As is the case in any interview situation, your ability to **stay focused and to give thoughtful responses** to questions are crucial.



Before leaving an interview you should be clear as to the next step. Your interviewer will usually tell you when you can expect to hear from them. If he or she says nothing, you may ask, “How should we proceed from here?” or “When might I expect to hear from you?” If you continue to be interested in this opportunity, tell the interviewer. Do not let them leave without knowing that you would like to proceed to the next step.

As soon as possible after you have left the interview, **take notes about what happened.** If you are going to another interview in the same day, this is particularly important, because you don’t want to confuse any details. This information will become crucial if you are invited back for a second interview. Be sure to note information you learned about the organization or the field, impressions of the people with whom you met, things you would like to find out more about, your responsibilities as far as any follow-up call, and expectations for hearing from them. If you did not receive business cards from the people you met (or see their names on a diploma on the wall), you may call the organization directly when you get home to ask the receptionist for the correct spellings of their names and titles.

As always, writing a **prompt thank-you note** is a must. The note can be brief and should not exceed one page. Your correspondence will serve to accomplish the following: you can express your appreciation, reconfirm your interest in the job, underline how your background and skills would fulfill the responsibilities of the position, and demonstrate that you were an active listener by sharing further thought on a topic that arose.

THE SECOND INTERVIEW
(AND THIRD AND FOURTH . . .)

Almost all of what applies to first interviews applies to subsequent interviews, because you are usually meeting more people from the same organization for the first time. The greatest difference is likely to be in the level of understanding that you have about the organization. There can be numerous variations: you may interview first with a human resources staff person and then be invited to return to meet several more people; you may have a successful on-campus interview and then be invited to the home office to meet other people; you may in fact be interviewing with one person who is so impressed that he or she immediately calls a colleague to ask if that person has time to meet you.

If time has passed before you are invited to return for further discussions, **take the opportunity to reflect on your first conversation**. The second interview is your opportunity to show that you have listened and learned. The more details you know about a position, the more successfully you can communicate your ability to meet its requirements. Think about what you know the employer is looking for and describe elements of your background and skills in such a way that you show that you have those specific qualifications. A candidate who can take information learned in a first interview and apply it in later interviews will be considered an astute observer and a quick study.

If you have been saturated with information about the organization, position, training program, benefits, and anything else that might apply, certainly your interviewers will understand if you don't have a long list of questions to ask. The preferred option, however, is to **formulate a few new questions, perhaps more detailed or more sophisticated**, based on what you have learned.

Areas to pursue with more specific questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Further clarification of the position — responsibilities, projects, travel, how you would fit into the group.
- Further information about your prospective department—goals, career paths, training offered, how it fits into the organization's overall strategy.
- Further questions about the plans, culture, direction, philosophy of the organization.

As with a first interview, **it is important to be attuned to the position of the person with whom you are speaking**. On a day- or half-day-long series of interviews, you may have the opportunity to ask questions of someone who would be your peer, someone who would be your supervisor, a representative of the human resources office, and the president or director. They will each provide a different perspective and knowledge base.



The keys to managing the interview process successfully are preparation and practice. If you are diligent at both, you will present yourself in the best possible light and will be recognized by employers as a strong and effective candidate. Good Luck!

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Office of Career Services offers research materials, mock interviews, resume writing and interview workshops, and individual career counseling. More information about OCS can be found online at:

<http://www.ocs.fas.harvard.edu>

and at the office:

**Office of Career Services
Harvard University
54 Dunster Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-2595**

QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO YOUR EDUCATION

Why did you choose Harvard? Your concentration?

What class have you taken that has had the greatest impact on your thinking?

If you could change something at Harvard what would it be?

How do you decide which co-curricular activities in which to participate?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOMEWORK YOU'VE DONE

In what way do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?

What do you think it takes to be successful in this position/ organization/field? In what ways does this fit you?

What about this organization impresses you in comparison with others in this field?

What do you believe are the key issues and problems in the field/ industry today?

What do you think you would like least about this job/organization/ field?

What are the qualities of a successful manager?

What do you anticipate learning in this position?

If you were hiring someone for this job what qualities would you look for?

Why this field/industry? i.e. Why teaching?

Why did you decide to apply to my organization?

Why should we hire you?

How does your previous experience prepare you for this position?

What do you anticipate enjoying most in this type of position? least?

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QUESTIONS TO ASCERTAIN THE LEVEL OF YOUR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Tell me about yourself.

How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?

What strengths would you bring to this position?

In what way do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?

Describe the job or the activity that has had the greatest impact on your career goals.

What are your long/short range goals and objectives? How will this job contribute toward your achieving them?

What do you think it takes to be successful in this position/ organization/field? In what ways does this fit you? How does it not fit you?

What other positions/fields are you considering?

What is your greatest weakness?

Describe an experience at which you have failed.

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

What do you think you would like least about this job/organization/ field?

If I were to plan a training program for you, what areas should I address in order to assist you to succeed?

What do you anticipate learning in this position?

What have you learned from mistakes you have made? Give examples.

What are your three best/worst traits?

What qualities separate you from everyone else?

What adjectives describe you most accurately?

QUESTIONS

WORKSTYLE QUESTIONS

Describe work environments in which you thrive.

Do you work more effectively in a large or small organization? Why?

Do you work more effectively on a team or alone? Why?

How much structure/direction do you prefer in a work environment? Why?

What was the least appealing aspect of your last job?

Are you more comfortable following or leading? Why?

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS (YOUR PERSONAL PREFERENCES, STYLE, MOTIVATORS)

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Describe a situation in which you were required to work with people who were different from you.

Describe a time/activity when you were highly motivated.

What other positions/fields are you considering?

What kind of organizational culture are you looking for?

What do you do in your spare time?

What have you read recently?

If you could have dinner with a famous person, past or present, whom would you choose?

What are the most important rewards that you anticipate receiving in your career?

What do you expect to be earning in five years? Would you work on commission?

Give an example of when you have had to perform under pressure?

Are you willing to travel? Relocate?

Do you have a geographical preference? Why?

Describe a difficult problem you have faced and how you resolved it.

Tell me about a project you completed independently?

Describe the job or situation in which you have held the greatest degree of responsibility.

Describe a time when you were a leader. What is your leadership style?

What was your most difficult experience?

What were some of the most challenging projects you have worked on?

Tell me about a tough decision that required you to alter your course?

Describe a difficult interpersonal encounter during a leadership position.

What characteristics do you admire in others?

SKILLS-BASED QUESTIONS

Give an example of when you have had to perform under pressure?

Why should we hire you?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

Do you have any questions you would like to ask of me?

What do I need to know about you that I have not learned through my questions?

ADDRESSING YOUR WORST FEARS

How would you answer the three questions you most hope will not be asked?

NOTES