



JCU Career Center's Guide to Interview Preparation

PREPARE, PRACTICE and PRESENT

While the resume gets you the interview, it is the interview that gets you the job! It is so important to be prepared by researching the company, anticipating and practicing questions and preparing questions to ask during your interview. There are many ways Career Services can help you get ready for your interview:

Prepare to be Your Best

Employers are impressed by candidates who have researched the organization, analyzed the job description and show energy and enthusiasm for the job. Take the following steps to increase your interview IQ:

Research the organization

Learn as much as you can before the interview. Visit their website to understand their products/services, volume of business, competitors, culture, and other information. Search for news articles or other publications about the organization. Use Google News, LexisNexis, Hoovers, Wetfeet, and Business Week, as well as LinkedIn and Twitter.

Research the job

In addition to researching the company, you need to understand as much as you can about the job itself. Analyze the job description and match your experiences, skills and interests to the job. It is important to have a good idea of a salary range for the position so that you can better negotiate when the time comes. Professional trade associations, the Department of Labor and www.salary.com are some sources of salary statistics. Speaking to professionals in the field is the best way to find accurate salary information (see Informational Interviewing handout).

Know yourself

Now that you have completed your company, job, and salary research, you need to focus on yourself. Why are you interested in this position? How do your experience and qualifications fit the requirements of the job? Be able to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, your educational and work experiences, and your goals and values. Write down your accomplishments and prepare concrete examples as evidence.

Know the interview format ahead of time

Employers, depending on the type of role they are interviewing for, may structure the format to highlight job-seekers strengths and abilities to think on their feet. It is completely appropriate to ask "with whom will I be meeting?" and "how long should I plan to be at your office?" so you can prepare appropriately and pace yourself once you are there. Two main types of interviews are: Screening Interviews and Behavioral based interviews.

SCREENING INTERVIEW (BASIC INTERVIEWING/FIRST ROUND INTERVIEW)

This is the most common type and often called a “personal interview.” It is typically a one-on-one exchange at the organizations offices. In order to best prepare you will want to know the length of the interview which can usually range from 30 to 90 minutes. If the interview is 30 minutes you have to be concise and have a high impact with your answers. If it is 60 or 90 minutes you will want to go into much more depth and use specific examples to support your generalizations.

Example Screening Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in this position?
3. Where do you see yourself in five years?
4. Can you describe one or two of your most important accomplishments?
5. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
6. Describe a situation in which you worked as a member of a team/acted as a leader.
7. Why should I hire you?
8. List three things your former supervisor/co-workers would say about you.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Common questions listed previously are typical for first round interviewing or screening interviews. However, more involved interviewing will include “Behavioral Questions”. These questions are open-ended and require the candidate to TELL A STORY with what action was involved and what results came from that action. To best prepare for Behavioral Interview the **S.T.A.R.** technique is strongly advised. **This is your chronological thought process when answering behavioral interview questions. Your past successes will be a good predictor of your future successes!!**

SITUATION or TASK: Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, class project, or any relevant event.

ACTION you took: Describe the actions you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.

RESULTS you achieved: What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Example Behavioral Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a time on a team, when a team member was not pulling their weight, what did you do?
2. How have you used your analytical skills in the past to be successful?
3. Tell me about a time when you identified a problem and went about resolving it?
4. In the past when you did not like someone at work, how did you handle it?
5. In the past when you disagreed with someone at work, how did you handle it?
6. Have you ever worked on a project and it didn't go as planned? What were the problems and what did you do?

Practice, practice, practice

Read the job description thoroughly. Prepare answers to potential questions in advance. Be sure to connect your skills with their specific requirements. Practice your answers with a friend or a Career Advisor.

Recorded mock interviews are also available, before or after a practice session with a counselor. Take advantage of InterviewStream, an online interview-practice tool that can be used from home if you have a webcam on your computer, or from the designated computer at the Career Center.

Prepare a list of questions to ask

The questions you ask indicate your level of interest in the organization and your preparation for the interview. If you don't have any questions to ask, most employers will think you're not really interested in the job. Don't ask questions that could easily be answered through your own research. Instead, ask questions which demonstrate a genuine interest in and understanding of the organization and the position.

GOAL: Prepare 20 to 30 questions for the interview

- Many of your questions will be answered during the interview conversations. However, you need to be prepared
- NEVER say you do not have any questions or that your questions have been answered.

In developing questions, you can categorize them as follows:

Whole company information: Questions regarding the “big picture” of the company such as information pertaining to: mission statement, recent news/press releases, product or service information, geographical information, annual finance reporting, ownership, history.

Objective: 5-8 prepared questions

Department/Division specific: Questions regarding where your position is managed such as department or division management, specific projects or product out of this division, staffing in this division, department activities such as meetings or annual events, management hierarchy, and outside of work activities such as community service or social gatherings.

Objective: 5-8 prepared questions

Job specific: Questions pertaining to the job for which you are interviewing such as training for the job, management, who do you report to, how many people at your level, how big is the “team”, typical daily/weekly tasks, 90 day review, annual review, first month on the job responsibilities.

Objective: 10-12 prepared questions

Interview process/Closing: Questions regarding next steps in the interview process, such as follow up information, when to expect hearing from the company, information needed such as references/ extra resumes, ask for business cards of those interviewing you, anything else they want to ask you before you leave the interview. Additionally, be sure to have a strong closing indicating your interest in the position and letting the interviewer know you will be following up. Within 24-48 hours be sure to send a thank you note (handwritten or by email).

Objective: 5 prepared questions

General themes you should learn more about:

- Company information regarding the general product or service
- Information regarding company reputation and financial foundation
- Management style and areas for professional development
- Office culture and employee retention
- General sense of personality and environment

Where can you get this information?

Company website, business journals, daily news, people who have or currently work there, internet research guides such as Career Connection, OCIS, www.vault.com, Google, and LinkedIn.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Thank You Notes

Employers expect to hear from you and will wonder about your interest in the position and your professionalism if they don't receive one. Traditionally thank-you notes have been brief handwritten notes sent by regular mail. It is completely acceptable to send a typed note by regular mail or by email. Try to send it within 24 hours after the interview, but don't send it immediately after, while on the commute home. Give yourself a little time to actually process the interview and write a targeted, thoughtful note.

Responding to the Job Offer

Your first step after being given a verbal job offer is to thank the employer for the offer, ask when you can expect to receive a written offer, and when they need to hear back from you regarding your answer. It is not advised to accept the offer on the spot, as that will not leave you even the possibility for negotiating your salary or other elements within the offer. After receiving the offer letter with salary and benefits information, you can now ask any questions, negotiate, and/or accept the offer. However, upon receiving a job offer, if there is uncertainty, be sure to consult those experienced with the process such as family members or friends. You may also consult the JCU Career Center for additional advice on how to respond or negotiate the offer.