# Interviewing

ST PAUL CAMPUS career center

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## Research the Employer

Researching the employer is a critical first step to preparing for an interview. Plan to gather comprehensive information such as products, clients, customers, financial situation, current news, and/or organizational structure. Places to go to gather this information include:

- Organization website – know the site extremely well
- U of M Business Reference Library – http://busref.lib.umn.edu/
- Current employees, former employees, or clients via informational interviews
- News articles: Pioneer Press, StarTribune, Twin Cities Business Journal, Wall Street Journal

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## Research the Position/Anticipate Questions

Employers often create interview questions directly around the skills listed in the job posting. It is, therefore, very important to do the following:

- Request a comprehensive description of the job prior to an interview.
- Ask someone in a similar career with another organization about the skills required for their job.
- Review the job description and make a list of skills and qualities required for the position.
- Use the skills list to create a list of questions an employer might ask in the job interview.

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## Identify Your Qualifications

- What are your top 3-5 qualifications for the position? Develop a plan for communicating these skills in your interview.
- Make a list of your "shining moments"- specific times when you did an exceptional job in a work, academic or volunteer activity. What skills and qualities did you show as a result of these exceptional moments? These examples can be excellent proof of your skills in an interview.
- Prepare a professional portfolio that shows samples of your work – this is relevant to all industries! Include items that show as many skills from the job description as possible.
- Determine your weaknesses as it relates to the position. Create a plan for how you will address and minimize these weaknesses in the interview.
- What is your unique selling point that makes you different from other candidates who may have similar skills and qualifications?
- Identify why you want *this* job with *this* organization. How does this fit with your career goals?

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The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This material is available in alternative formats upon request.

## Complete Final Preparations

There are a lot of small things that you should do to prepare for the interview in order to make a great impression:

- Prepare answers to likely interview questions; rehearse them **out loud**!
- Schedule a mock interview at the St. Paul Campus Career Center by calling 612-624-2710.
- Call the employer to ask about the length of the interview, who you are meeting with and get complete directions.
- Decide how you will dress for the interview (see our *Interview Dress* handout for more information).
- Organize what you will bring: resume copies, references, transcript, pen, portfolio, note paper, and/or questions you want to ask the employer.
- Get a good night's sleep before the interview and eat something before you go on your interview.

## The Interview – Arriving

The first moments of the interview are often most important because it is the first impression the employer will have of you. Consider the following to ensure the best possible impression:

- Arrive for your interview 10 minutes early.
- Treat administrative assistants and receptionists with complete kindness and respect.
- Greet the receptionist and give them your name, appointment time and interviewer name.
- While waiting for someone to come get you, breathe deeply and relax!

When the interviewer comes to great you, be sure to:

- Stand up to show respect and to demonstrate self-assurance.
- Make eye contact to show confidence.
- Smile – look happy and eager to be there!
- Shake the person's hand in a firm and poised manner.
- Introduce yourself giving both your first and last name (especially if it is hard to pronounce), repeat their name as well to help you remember "Nice to meet you Ms. Jones, I'm Kelly Smriga."

## The Interview – Body Language & Voice Quality

Studies have shown that in the first moments of an interview 55% of your impression is on how you look, 38% is based on your voice quality, and only 7% on the content of what you say. Clearly, content becomes important once the first moments pass, but this illustrates the importance of body language and voice in an interview. Be sure to follow the below tips:

- Sit up straight – no slouching!
- Smile and look happy, your face may look too serious when you are nervous
- Avoid fidgeting with hair, jewelry or pens
- Make eye contact with the interviewer(s) throughout the meeting
- Speak loud enough to be heard and enunciate your words
- Avoid verbal fillers such as "um" or "like"
- Don't raise your voice at the end of a sentence, this tone can give the impression you are unsure

## Questions to Ask Employers

At the conclusion of your interview, expect to be asked what questions you have for those interviewing you. It is critical that you have a prepared list of questions for this moment in the interview. Ask for information about the position, about the organization, and what they are looking for in an ideal candidate. Select questions that will help you determine if this organization and position are a good fit with your career goals.

The list below is not intended to be comprehensive. You should also include questions specific to your field, the company and your individual needs.

- What type of projects should I expect in my first year on the job?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff right now?
- Could you tell me about the people who would be reporting to me?
- Who would be my supervisor for this position? How would you describe their supervisory style?
- What kind of training might I expect if hired for this position?
- What is the usual line of advancement for this position?
- What is the method of performance evaluation?
- Do you have any concerns about my qualifications?
- What skills and characteristics are most needed in this position?
- What is the most difficult part of this job?
- May I see the area where I would be working?
- Is there anything I can do or study to get a head start on learning this job?
- How did this position become vacant?
- What would a typical day be like?
- What are the biggest challenges facing your department in the next year?
- What is the work environment like?
- When might I expect to hear back from you?
- What changes do you foresee in the department/company in the next two years?

**DO NOT** ask questions about salary, benefits, or vacation time at this stage in the interview process. Doing so leads employers to believe you are only interested in the money, not the job and organizations.

## Closing an Interview

Once your questions have been answered, it is also ideal to have a closing statement at the end of your interview. In this statement, thank them for their time, re-highlight your key qualifications, and state your interest in the position.

> "Thank you very much for interviewing me today, I have enjoyed learning more about your company. I really believe that my journalistic writing experience and my computer graphics skills make me a great fit for the position. I am very excited about your organization and want to reiterate my strong interest in this opportunity."

Before you leave, it is appropriate to ask for the next steps and time line for the hiring process. It would also be wise to ask for the business card of anyone who has interviewed you.

## After the Interview

There are several recommended steps to complete after an interview is complete:

1. Write and send a thank you letter within 48 hours of the job interview. For suggestions on writing a thank you note, see the *Thank You Letter* Handout available at the St. Paul Campus Career Center.
2. Make a list of as many questions you remember from the job interview. These questions will be excellent practice for future job interviews with similar positions.
3. Call the employer to inquire about the status of the position once the appropriate amount of time has passed. The timing of this call should be based upon the time line they discussed with you at the end of the interview.

## Final Interview Tips

### Do

- Do express enthusiasm throughout your interview it is one of the top qualities employers seek.
- Do listen carefully to the question asked and be sure to answer the question directly.
- Do pause to organize your thoughts before you begin to answer a question.
- Do project confidence, but try not to come across as arrogant or over-confident.
- Do be yourself! Try to show your genuine personality.
- Do turn off your cell phone during an interview.

### Don't

- Don't be late – ever!
- Don't speak badly about previous employer or co-workers.
- Don't bring up topics that may generate strong emotional reactions from interviewers such as religion or politics. It is also best to avoid personal issues.
- Don't use absolute phrases or minimizing phrases "I only…" "I just…" "I always…" "I never…"
- Don't use the words "like" or "um" as they sound less professional.
- Don't smoke before an interview and don't chew gum during a job interview.
- Don't answer questions with only a "yes" or "no." Instead explain yourself and give some details.

## Related Resources

The St. Paul Campus Career Center in 198 McNeal Hall has additional books and handouts to assist you with your interview skills. Stop by our office to check out the following materials:

**Handouts:**

Sample Interview Questions
Behavioral Based Interviews
Interview Dress

**Books:**

Behavior Based Interviewing by Terry Fitzwater
Dress Smart Men/Women by Kim Gross & Jeff Stone

Individual appointments and mock interviews are also available in the St. Paul Campus Career Center. To schedule an appointment with a career professional, call 612-624-2710.