

Interviewing

Career Readiness & Cooperative Education

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You only have one chance to make a positive first impression. Your overall appearance is critical when meeting an employer for the first time. It only takes someone 30 seconds to assess how they will respond to you. So, if your resume got you the interview, the interview will get you the job! In the Career Readiness & Professional Development Office at Lakeland University, the staff can assist you in fine-tuning your interviewing skills so that you get a job offer. Utilize this guide while preparing and then schedule an appointment with a counselor to have a mock-interview!

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

■ **Informational Interview** This method is an excellent way to make contact with a potential employer in a non-threatening situation.

This method involves contacting employers and setting up an interview to obtain information about their industry, organization and job opportunities in the field. When using this method, it is important to do your homework in advance and do a little research. The interview should last about 15 – 20 minutes – plan your questions and take notes. Be sure to thank the person for their time and any referrals or leads they might be able to offer. Finally, ask if you can leave a copy of your resume.

This method is best used in the beginning stages of the job search when you are not exactly sure what opportunities exist in a particular field. It is an excellent idea to follow up after your informational meeting with an employer a few months later to inquire if their organization might have any openings.

■ **Phone Interview** This interview is generally used as an initial screening tool prior to a second interview. If a company received a lot of applications, this may be their first round to get to know the candidates. This type should be taken just as seriously as a traditional/behavioral interview, as you have to pass this point to be offered a position! Consider dressing up, just as you would for a typical interview, to help put you in the right mind-set; wearing your pajamas won't offer the same benefits. If you are using a cell phone, ensure that you will have good reception and the battery is charged. Finally, notify your roommates or family members, so that they don't interrupt the conversation.

■ **Traditional Interview** This type of interview is when an employer asks the candidate a list of questions, such as "Tell me about yourself." Generally, the responses include information about your previous experiences.

■ **Behavioral Interview** This type of interview can help employers predict your future behavior with more accuracy. During a behavioral interview, the employer will ask a question about a situation and then will follow up with more in-depth questions about that experience. This will help them identify specific characteristics that they are seeking in an employee. The responses should use the **STAR** approach – situation, task, action, result.

SITUATION Describe a specific event or situation that you were involved in. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.

TASK Describe the responsibilities you had with the situation and what your role was.

ACTION Describe the action YOU took; if it was a group effort, still focus on what you specifically accomplished.

RESULT Describe the end result of the situation, what you learned or what happened.

PLANNING

- Do your homework. You should know the company well and do research on its website. This will show initiative and your preparedness in an interview.
- Prepare a list of stories you can tell about yourself that relate to the position responsibilities. For example, a time where you solved a problem, a time where you worked as part of a team, a time where you had to make a decision, etc.
- Practice, practice, practice! Have a friend or family member ask you possible interview questions and complete a mock interview with the Career Readiness & Professional Development Office. During an interview, you want to be able to easily recall some examples of your skills and experiences.
- Come prepared, arrive early and make sure you have good directions to get there. Bring a few copies of your resume, a portfolio to write on and a list of questions you want to ask the employer.
- Review the job description to ensure you are well aware of the responsibilities and highlight related experiences throughout the questioning.
- Smile and relax! If you are nervous, it will show. The more prepared you are, the easier things will be.

DRESS WITH STYLE

- Make sure the employer remembers you for your conversation, not your clothes.
- Select apparel, fragrances, jewelry, hairstyle, etc. that does not detract from your professional image.
- Remove any facial or body piercings, other than a single set of earrings.
- Visible tattoos should be covered to avoid distraction.
- Apparel should be clean and neatly pressed.
- Apparel should fit well and remain in place while sitting/walking. This is especially important if your weight has fluctuated...you might need to purchase something new.

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- Less is more. Keep your look simple until you become accustomed to the specific work environment dress.

TIPS FOR MEN

- Wear a dark, conservative suit in black, navy, or dark gray with a long-sleeve dress shirt in a solid color.
- Wear a tie in a solid color or a simple pattern.
- Shoes should be clean and polished and match the suit well.
- Clothing should fit appropriately – not too tight that it will pull in the jacket or too loose that it hangs on the body.
- Limit the amount of cologne you use – too much will be overpowering and distract the employer.
- Wear minimal jewelry – a watch or ring would be acceptable.

TIPS FOR WOMEN

- Select a skirted suit, traditionally knee-length, or pantsuit. Choose colors that are classic, such as black, navy or dark gray.
- Select blouses/sweaters that provide visual interest.
- Avoid transparent, tightly fitted, or low necklines.
- Perfume should never be strong – when in doubt, do not wear any.
- Use natural-looking make-up and clear nail polish.
- Do not carry a purse and briefcase – only use one or the other.
- Wear flat shoes or low pumps that are comfortable to walk in. You don't want to be caught off-guard if you are given a tour of the company. Avoid open-toed shoes.
- Add simple accessories to express your personality.

ON A TIGHT BUDGET?

- Plan ahead! If you are pressed for time, you may end up having to spend more time than you need/want to.
- Purchase items that are versatile so that you can wear in multiple ways or mix and match tops/pants/skirts. Focus on classic, well-made separates.
- Stick to colors that are neutral – such as black, navy or dark gray.
- Invest in season-less fabrics that travel well, such as a blend of cotton and rayon.
- There are several local places that offer inexpensive clothing:
 - Goodwill – Greenwing Drive, Sheboygan – 920-459-8600
 - Nikki's Nex 2 New – 1019 N. 9th St, Sheboygan – 920-395-2442
 - St. Vincent De Paul Society – 4215 Wisconsin 42, Sheboygan – 920-457-4844

NON-VERBAL CUES

- Maintain and establish eye contact with an interviewer.
- Maintain an erect posture with your shoulders back – no slouching.
- Maintain open body language – do not fold/cross your hands as if you have something to hide.
- Give a firm handshake when meeting for the first time.
- Have a confident attitude and remain positive about your experiences. You must be able to sell yourself and your experiences in order to get the job!

A FEW DO-NOTs...

- Do not be late.
- Do not lie about your experiences.
- Do not discuss salary or benefits during the first interview.
- Do not discuss politics, religion or other sensitive issues.
- Do not use slang or jargon.
- Do not wear strong scents or too much jewelry.

SAMPLE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR AN EMPLOYER

- Tell me about a typical day in your office. What are your responsibilities?
- What type of education and training did you complete for this position?
- What was your career path to this position?
- What type of skills or personal characteristics would be important for this type of position?
- What types of advancement opportunities exist in this field?

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- What are the greatest aspects of working in this profession? Greatest challenges?
- What would be the typical salary range in this profession?
- What are the hours like? Are evenings/weekends involved? Is there travel involved?

SAMPLE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR AN EMPLOYER [CONTINUED]

- What types of professional development opportunities exist? Are there specific organizations that I should consider getting involved in?
- What would you suggest to a college student who is interested in earning a position in the field?
- What is the best way to find out about current openings in the profession?
- Is there anyone else you would suggest I talk to about the profession?

SAMPLE OF PHONE/TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR A CANDIDATE

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?
- What are your long-term and short-term goals?
- Why did you choose this career path?
- Describe a situation when you were successful.
- Describe a situation when you had to be a team player.
- What motivates you?
- How would you describe yourself? How would your previous co-workers describe you?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- Describe a time when you had a conflict with another person and how you resolved it.
- What do you know about our company?
- Why did you decide to apply for a position with our company?
- What qualities are you looking for in a supervisor?
- What type of feedback did you get from your previous supervisor in a formal evaluation?
- Are you an organized individual?
- How do you manage your time?
- Why should I hire you?

SAMPLE OF PHONE/TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR AN EMPLOYER

- How would you describe your management style?
- What are the most important traits you look for in an employee?
- Where do you see the company going in the next few years?
- Can you describe a typical day on the job?
- What type of training is involved when someone is first hired? Any on-going training?
- What types of professional development opportunities exist?
- What do you enjoy most about working for the company? What is the biggest challenge?
- Why did you decide to work for the company?
- What type of advancement opportunities exist?

SAMPLE OF BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR A CANDIDATE

- Tell me about a time where you set a goal and you were able to achieve it.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy you did not agree with.
- Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you have had to make in the last year.
- Describe a time when you had to make an unpopular decision.
- Describe a time where you had to use good judgment.

FOLLOW-UP

- Send a hand-written thank you note immediately after the meeting! This will provide them with a lasting impression and another opportunity to recall your conversation.