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Guide to Interviewing

Note: Request an electronic copy by emailing psyadv@iupui.edu. It will make following the numerous links in this document much easier.

When you apply for a job, one thing to keep in mind is that when a company seeks to hire someone, they are seeking someone who can solve a problem. Otherwise, why would they hire someone? They need someone to fill an important role within their organization. **Your primary objective in your resume, cover letter, and the interview is to convince the employer that you can “solve their problem(s)”** by convincing them that what you bring to the table is exactly what they need. In addition to reviewing this guide, there are great resources online for learning about strategies for responding to common interview questions and YouTube has some useful videos that might help guide your preparation.

First Impressions

People make snap judgments about someone they meet immediately. So, how do you “impress” the interviewer when you walk into a room? When you approach the interviewer be certain to greet them with a firm (not floppy) handshake and direct eye contact. First impressions happen before one word comes out of your mouth so be aware of your posture, body language and tone of voice. They will convey your level of confidence and your attitude. Consequently, it is very difficult to objectively assess your own body language and voice tone. The only way to practice this is to do it with someone else and request honest feedback.

General Communication Style

Here are some elements of communication style that you should be paying attention to.

- Pleasant/positive voice and attitude
- Logical and organized in thoughts and words
- Speak fluently and have ready responses
- Create a positive and professional impression
- Be persuasive but not pushy
- Show genuine enthusiasm
- Stay job focused (avoid talking about your personal life)
- Show respect

Interview Questions

Question 1: Tell me a little about yourself.

This is a very common interview question. Prepare your response in a tone and style that is natural, professional and reflects how you would normally speak. Rehearse this response out loud in front of a mirror or with someone else and see if it sounds natural. Avoid using fancy words (often misused) and unnatural transitions like “moreover” and

“notwithstanding.” Be natural. Use simple, clear language and *back up your assertions with clear examples from work or school*. Avoid any references to family, personal stuff, age, your social life etc. Keep it focused on your work and academic experiences. Lastly, avoid overused and lofty statements like “children are our future” or “I just want to help people” or “make the world a better place”. If you’ve heard the phrase before, it’s probably overused and does not carry a lot of meaning.



What NOT to do: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIIIiOo53To&playnext_from=TL&videos=dkl4f29u7IE

Advice: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ezFNrWMTlc&playnext_from=TL&videos=tGKE8dfv-z0

More advice: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8EFRIJKARM&playnext_from=TL&videos=T4ljeVrZmLs



<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/qt/yourself.htm>

Key elements to include when answering these questions:

- Mention strengths and give examples of how specifically you have used these strengths successfully
- Relate strengths to the job at hand based on what you know from the job description

Question 2: Why are you interested in working here?

The purpose of this question is often to find out if you know anything about the company to which you are applying. In other words, have you done your homework? So, before you show up for an interview, you should do ample research online and through any contacts you have to be sure you know all you can about the company’s mission, vision, market, customers, products, etc. Know something about the company *and* the industry in general. Consider this prep work like you might one of the most important finals you’ve ever prepared for. When answering the questions, you want to express what you know about the company but also **how you believe you fit and why you are the best candidate for the job**.

Key elements to include when answering these questions:

- Convey your strengths and how they fit well with the position. Describe how you can use your skills, strengths and experience in this job
- Cite the job description and other research you have done on the company
- Give examples of personal strengths and/or experiences related to the job description

Question 3: Why should I hire you?

So why are you a better candidate than the next person walking through the door? With this question, your objective is to convince the interviewer that you have direct and/or transferable skills that you bring to the table that will help them “solve their problem,” and confidence in your skills and abilities (try not to over exaggerate your skills and abilities. Be humble enough to admit that you don’t know everything but you are certainly eager to learn).



http://www.quintcareers.com/transferable_skills.html

Key elements to include when answering these questions:

- Elaborate on your strengths and key experiences
- Relate these strengths and experiences to the job (and what you know about the “problem they are trying to solve” by filling this position)
- Explain why you believe you are the best candidate for this job (how will you solve their problem?)

Question 4: What is your greatest strength and your greatest weakness?

It is highly likely that you will be asked these two questions (usually separately). It may seem simple at first glance. I can brag about a strength and I can take a negative like “I can’t say no,” or “I work too hard” or “I’m too nice” and turn it into a positive. Employers see right through that. What they are really looking for when they ask this question is can you self-assess your own strengths and weaknesses and talk about them in an honest and forthright way (but not too revealing or self-deprecating). So, think about the job you’re applying for...if it is a job giving public presentation daily, I wouldn’t claim public speaking as your weakness. But, if your job might entail *some* public speaking, and public speaking is an area that is a weakness for you, you might say something like:

“A weakness of mine is public speaking, especially in front of large groups. I tend to be more comfortable one on one or in small groups. While I am able to do it and prepare, what I believe are pretty good talks, I get quite nervous. **I have been working to overcome this.** I took a speech class about a year ago and did pretty well, I got an A. I have also been volunteering to talk more in my classes; I volunteer to give reading summaries in one of my classes. I am also going to be presenting my research findings at our schools Capstone Poster Presentation next month. And, although I am nervous, I’m finding that if I practice a lot before my presentation I can reduce my nervousness. I’m also learning that the more I do speak in front of groups, the better I get, which also builds my confidence.”

Again, this example is just that, an example. You need to do some self-evaluation to determine how you are dealing with a true weakness. The caution is to choose a weakness that is not *too* tightly interwoven with the job at hand. Notice the bolded line in the response above....“**I have been working to overcome this.**” This is the most crucial element of your answer. Employers want to know how you work to improve yourself, especially when it’s not required that you do so, but that you’ve chosen to work on a weakness on your own. So, briefly identify the weakness and spend most of your time identifying strategies for overcoming said weakness.

Another tip is to keep your response focused on **work related** experiences, NOT personal. Example: “My greatest weakness is my kids...if they need something; I’m there for them, no matter what!” That says to me (as an employer) that you miss work a lot!



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PapEY2EcoMI&playnext_from=TL&videos=j3ju5YXXOgw

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1ucmfPOBV8&playnext_from=TL&videos=S-98ESmmAR8

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1QPafzXO-w&feature=Playlist&p=97257D72EBB155A7&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=4



<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/24/AR2006062400326.html>

Key elements to include when answering these questions:

- Well thought out response
- Clearly articulate strength and give a powerful example
- Name and weakness and how you are overcoming that weakness
- Don’t fake it
- Demonstrate self knowledge

Interviewing is a fine balancing act between expressing confidence and humility.

Question 5: Behaviorally Based Questions.

Behaviorally based interview questions are the norm for most interviews. Employers want to know how you handled real challenges in academics and in the work place. They want to see if you can reflect back on things you did well and lessons learned. Read and watch the links below to gain more insight on what employers are looking for in your responses.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-2z-WR8OWg&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XESMqFCRBE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NL3hyzwEtJs&feature=fvw>



<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewquest.htm> (General Questions & Answers)

When answering these questions, be certain to use ***specific examples*** from work, volunteering or academics and avoid speaking in clichés, tired expressions and platitudes. Use the STAR (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esults) method that is addressed in one of the videos above. Focus on ***behaviors***, not how you felt, focus on strategies you used in the situation. And always avoid placing blame on others (no matter how well deserved that blame might be – it will only come across as whiny in an interview) and trigger red flags for the interviewer.

Key elements to include when answering these questions:

- Provide specific examples from work or school that apply to the question
- Be sure to include specific outcomes from these examples
- If you share a story in which you did not perform optimally, identify specific lessons learned

Final tips: Avoid clichés like “I’m a hard worker” or “dedicated employee.” Instead, give examples of your hard work and dedication and let that suffice. Avoid qualifiers like “I always...” or “I never...” because really, who never or always does (fill in the blank). Additionally, avoid extreme statements like “I do whatever it takes to...” Really, even something unethical? Or, “Nothing can stop me.” Empty statements like this are unrealistic and not very thoughtful about your own limitations. Here’s an interesting post to help explain these grammatical and syntax issues further.



<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/always-never-usually-often-more-most.aspx>

You may be concerned about sounding too braggadocious when talking about your strengths. The remedy is always give evidence of what you state about yourself. Instead of saying my greatest strength is that “I’m very motivated and conscientious,” instead say, “I tend to be a very conscientious worker, for example...” or, “I am motivated to get work done on time, for example...” and provide behavioral evidence of the motivation and conscientiousness. Examples, examples, examples – we can’t stress that enough!