

INTERVIEWS - FROM A TO Z

So you completed your resume, put it into Cat Career Tracks (www.nmu.edu/careerservices/CatCareerTracks), onto several hot web sites, e-mailed it to a number of companies, and mailed it to a few others. Now the moment you've been waiting for - the phone call from the organization you would love to work for and they want you to interview with them for your dream job! You feel a sense of panic rush over you. What will they ask? What will you say? How do you know what to ask them? Well, you can relax knowing there are a number of things you can do to help prepare yourself for that big interview. So breathe easy and read on.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS WANT TO KNOW

A mistake that a number of people make in preparing for an interview is they simply review their resume and gather their list of references. What many people don't realize is many organizations today are relying less on questions that come straight from the resume like, "So tell me about your responsibilities as a hotel desk clerk," and more on questions like, "So tell me how you handled a difficult customer when you worked as a desk clerk." This type of question is known as a **behavior-based interview question** and gives the employer **insight into how you might respond in certain situations**. The underlying premise of behavior-based interviewing is that your past behavior is the best indicator of your future behavior. Organizations want to know not only that you have the technical knowledge to perform the job but also **how** you will perform on the job. So if you are interviewing for a supervisory role, you might be asked, "Describe how you would handle an employee who comes to you complaining about another coworker," and if you are interviewing for a sales position you might be asked, "Tell me about a time you had to persuade a previous boss or professor to your way of thinking." Anticipating what an organization wants to know about you will help you to prepare yourself for the interview. See sample interview questions in the section "Sample Interview Questions."

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

In order to prepare for an interview and help you feel less anxious about the experience, it's helpful to spend some time thinking about how you would respond to certain questions. To start, **consider some of the skills that would be important for the position for which you are interviewing**. For example, if you are interviewing for a marketing position, some important skills for the job would be the ability to communicate effectively, project management skills, teamwork, or creativity. With these skills in mind, **think about previous work experiences and/or classroom experiences you've had where you demonstrated these skills**. (Experiences with a campus or community organization are acceptable, too). Maybe you demonstrated communication skills through the many presentations you were required to give as a part of your coursework, or maybe your professor asked you to speak at a campus-wide event because she was so impressed with your speaking abilities. An example of project management skills might be the time your boss at the restaurant asked you to evaluate the

possibility of bringing in live music on weekends. You had to consider the costs, the revenue, the space required, the audience it would attract, the competition in the community, etc., and make a recommendation based on what you learned. Many times, we don't realize the skills we are developing on the job and in the classroom. **Don't sell yourself short when you think about your skills and abilities.** Chances are you've accomplished more than you think.

Take the time to practice talking about yourself and your accomplishments. You'll show confidence and why you are a good fit for the position. Do a practice interview with a friend, or with a staff member in Career Services.

It may be helpful for you to write down some of these examples to help clarify them in your mind. You don't want to memorize responses to potential interview questions (you want your responses to be natural), but you will likely feel more comfortable going into the interview if you've considered how you may respond to some of the questions. See the "Interview Cheat Sheet" worksheet below.

If you are about to graduate or have recently graduated, you should also be prepared to speak of your interest in this particular career, what classes you felt benefited you the most and why, what coursework you enjoyed most/least, campus activities, etc. All candidates should be prepared to state why they want the job, why they are interested in the organization, how their knowledge and skills will contribute to the organization, successes/failures, and why the organization should hire them. See sample interview questions in the section "Fifty Questions Recruiters Ask College Students."

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Part of your interview preparation should also include researching the organization you are interviewing with. Visit the organization's web site (if they have one) and learn as much as you can about its products, services, employees, mission, etc. If they don't have a web site, ask the organization for a copy of its annual report, or any general information or marketing materials. You can also check for company information in the Career Services Resource Room located at 3301 C.B. Hedgcock. Reviewing this information will help you demonstrate your knowledge of the organization during the interview. It will also help you to formulate some questions to ask during your interview process.

If you don't have a whole lot of interviewing experience or would like to improve your interviewing skills, contact a member of Career Services for assistance at 906-227-2800. You can discuss interviewing strategies or arrange for a practice interview to get feedback on your strengths and areas for development.

IT'S ALL ABOUT ATTITUDE

◆ There are many things about an interview that you can't necessarily control. One thing that you can control is the "a" word - **Attitude**. Attitude can have a significant impact on the success of your interview. It's important that you go into an interview feeling confident (not arrogant) about your abilities and what you have to offer an organization.

◆ When you meet or are introduced to someone, shake his/her hand firmly.

◆ Look the interviewer in the eyes when you respond to questions.

◆ Sit straight in your chair.

◆ Smile and be friendly during the process.

◆ Know that you have a lot of skills and strengths to offer. Focus on these strengths and don't be so concerned about what you can't do. Most organizations are aware that candidates come to them with some expertise that will need to be enhanced through formal and on-the-job training.



ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

In addition to preparing for an interview, there are a number of other things you can do to make yourself feel more comfortable and confident the day of your interview, and to help ensure a positive interview experience.

- Ask your organization contact for the names and titles of the individuals who will interview you that day. This will help you to understand the roles/perspectives of your interviewers, and may help you determine what types of questions would be appropriate to ask them.
- Make sure you know where you are going before the day of the interview. If you are unfamiliar with the location, drive to it (or take a cab) from where you are staying and time yourself. Allow extra time if you will be traveling in rush hour traffic. Plan to arrive within a block or so about 30-45 minutes prior to your interview. This will give you a chance to relax, prepare, and be sure you will be on time.
- The night before an interview, do things that help you to relax. Try to get a good night's rest.
- Bring extra copies of your resume and reference list with you. Bring a padfolio or notepad with your questions so you can make notes.
- Arrive approximately 15-20 minutes early for your interview. Don't be late, but don't arrive too early - it may make you appear too anxious or may inconvenience the staff.
- Be prepared for a meal interview. Some employers will take you to breakfast/lunch/dinner as part of your interview experience. For tips on how to handle a meal interview, see the "Dining Etiquette" section.
- At the end of your day, be sure to ask what the next steps in the process will be, such as "When can I expect to hear from you?" or "Will there be a second interview process?" This information will give you the organization's decision time frame, so you don't spend weeks wondering what is going on.
- Turn off your cell phone!

WHAT TO ASK EMPLOYERS

Think of the interview as your opportunity to learn as much about the employer as you can. You can learn a lot of things simply by observing the environment. Are the employees dressed casually or in suits? Do they seem relaxed or stressed? Does the furniture look comfortable and inviting or more stiff and formal? Is it noisy? Is it clean? Did people appear prepared to see you? Before you go to an interview, you need to decide what type of environment you'd like to work in and try to observe those things that will help determine if the organization could be a fit for you.

Asking questions is another way to learn more about the environment and the position. Below are some additional items to consider. Remember, you want to ask those questions that will help you make a decision about whether or not this is the right opportunity for you.

Depending on the job (and the interviewer), an interview can typically take anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. Most interviewers try to save you at least five-ten minutes to ask questions of them. Be sure you come prepared with a short list of questions to get answered. If you don't ask questions, you may be viewed as not having done your homework or as not really being interested in the job. You want to come up with questions that are important to you.

Stay away from asking questions about salary. Only discuss your salary expectations if the interviewer brings it up first. A human resources person should be able to give you a packet of information regarding employee benefits (this may not be offered to you during a first interview).

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE

When your interviews are completed, be sure to send a thank you letter to each individual who interviewed you. Even if you don't think you'd accept an offer from the company, it is still a nice and expected touch. Make sure the names and titles of the individuals are accurate and spelled correctly. If you interviewed with more than one person, thank everyone by name with whom you interviewed. Individual letters aren't necessary, but individual recognition is!

DINING ETIQUETTE

During your job search process, don't be surprised if a prospective employer takes you to lunch or dinner as part of your interview process. Employers like to take candidates out of the more standard "office interview" setting to see how you respond in a more social setting. Employers also know that meal interviews tend to make the candidate feel more relaxed, and perhaps more likely to comfortably provide information about himself/herself. Here are some important hints on how to handle a meal interview situation. Bon Appetit!

Do

- ◆ **Arrive on time.** Treat this breakfast/lunch/dinner interview as you would any other interview. Unless the employer is providing transportation, make sure you know the location of the interview meal and arrive 5-10 minutes early. If you arrive before your host, you will have a few minutes to relax and gather your thoughts before he/she arrives.
- ◆ **Feel free to ask questions during the meal.** Just like a regular interview, take this opportunity to educate yourself about the company, the position, and other areas of interest to you.
- ◆ **Sit up straight.** Just because a meal interview seems more relaxed than a regular interview does not mean it's okay to let your posture slide. Be aware of your body language and make sure you look professional.
- ◆ **Thank your host.** When the meal is complete, make sure to thank your host for his/her time and the meal. If this is the only interview you have with this individual, make sure to send a thank you letter.

Do Not

- ◆ **Order the most expensive item on the menu.** Unless your host recommends something to you that is on the expensive side, stick with a meal priced in the more "moderate" range. You will feel a little more than awkward if you order the Surf & Turf and your host orders the Caesar salad.
- ◆ **Order something you've never eaten before.** This isn't the time for a great food adventure. Stick with foods you know you like to avoid being served something you're afraid to put in your mouth. Also, stick to ordering foods that are easily eaten with a knife and fork. Pastas and large sandwiches may invite disaster, so try chicken, fish, salads, and meats instead.
- ◆ **Order alcohol.** Your best bet is an iced-tea, water, or soda. Even if your host orders a drink, it is always better to order a nonalcoholic beverage. Alcohol (even a small quantity) can make you less sharp and more apt to do or say something you wouldn't normally do or say. If your host orders a bottle of wine for the two of you or encourages you to order a drink, it's okay - just sip small quantities and make your drink last the whole meal.
- ◆ **Smoke.** If you are a smoker, don't smoke before, during, or after the meal. If you smoke on your way to the meal, you are likely to smell like smoke when you get there, which could be a

real turn-off to your host. It's also rude to get up and leave to take a smoking break during the meal. Pick up another habit for the day - like smiling.

- ◆ **Groom yourself at the table.** Freshening your makeup is a no-no. It's also not okay to put eye drops in your eyes or to comb/brush your hair. Save any grooming for the washroom only.
- ◆ **Lick your utensils or your fingers.** You don't want it to look like you are starving to death (even if this is the best meal you've had in a while). Stay away from foods that might tempt you to lick your fingers (like French fries, chicken wings, mozzarella sticks, etc.).
- ◆ **Feel like you have to clean your plate.** It's probably better to leave a little food on your plate. And don't push it around to make it look like you've eaten more than you have.
- ◆ **Ask for a to-go container.** Even if you have plenty of food left on your plate, the meal interview is not the time to take care of your meal planning for the week. Save the doggy bag for casual or informal dining.

Call or stop by the **Career Services** office for a list of sample interview questions or to schedule a practice interview appointment.

3302.3 C.B. Hedgcock
(906) 227-2800

careers@nmu.edu

www.nmu.edu/careerservices

www.nmu.edu/careerservices/CatCareerTracks