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WWW.ALUMNAE.SMITH.EDU
Knowing how to successfully interview is one of the most crucial elements of a job search. Good experience, internships, volunteering and academics all look great on a resume, but to land a job offer you need to be prepared to talk about your background with enthusiasm and confidence.

**Before the Interview**

**Succeeding at the interview is all about preparation.** The better prepared you are for the interview and the more research you do beforehand, the more likely it is that you will be offered the job.

**Think about what the employer is looking for.** There are three main things that employers want to know when they interview a candidate:

1. Do you have the skills to do the job?
2. Will you love the job and enjoy working here?
3. Will you fit into our organization’s culture?

1. **Do you have the skills to do the job?** Examine your resume and the job description, as well as job descriptions of competitors, which you can search for on large employment databases such as InDeed, Monster or LinkedIn. Make a list of the top skills needed, the main tasks you will need to accomplish and how the job aligns with the goals of the business. Write down specific examples from your experience including:
   - Quantifiable accomplishments
   - How you worked with or supervised others
   - The challenges you faced and how you solved them
   - What you enjoyed and learned
   - What you would do differently, if anything

2. **Will you love the job and enjoy working here?** Good managers know that if you love your job you will be motivated to do your best. In order to convey your love for the job, you first need to know what really motivates you and what you value in a job. Then look to find and explain matches between the job, the organization and what motivates you.

3. **Will you fit in to our organization’s culture?** An organization’s culture is many faceted, and includes the management style, personalities of co-workers, team dynamics, typical working hours, professional development, diversity, physical surroundings, philosophy and predictability vs. change. For you to enjoy your job, fit in with your co-workers, and be productive, it is important to make a good match with the organization’s culture.

**Do your homework.** Thoroughly research the organization and the staff with whom you’ll be interviewing. Know the organization’s mission, leadership, number of employees, products, services, programs, customers and competitors. Dig deeply: What is the company most proud of? How does the CEO describe what the business does? What recent events have happened involving the organization? How is it structured? How is it doing financially? Who are its key competitors?

**Sources for finding out about an organization:**

- *The organization’s website.* Read the “About Us” section, press releases, staff bios, annual reports and follow the links.
- *LexisNexis.* Available through the Neilson website, this database can be used to research articles from major magazines and newspapers. Key word search the organization’s name and key staff to get as much information as possible.
• **Social Media.** Use LinkedIn and Facebook to look up company information, employees you will be interviewing with and anyone you have a connection to at the company. It is also a good idea to follow a company on LinkedIn and Twitter and like the company on Facebook when you send in your resume.

• **Informational interviews.** Speak with Smith alumnae and others in the field that you find through the online alumnae directory and LinkedIn.

**Find out with whom you’ll be interviewing.** If you are not able to get the names of who you will be interviewing with, research all the managers in that department as well as departments that they work closely with. Depending on the position and field, you may be asked to prove your skills through a test, presentation or participation in a case or group interview.

**Prepare questions to ask your interviewer(s).** Go back to what is important to you in a job-your values, motivations, skills and ideal work environment. Use these to focus a list of thoughtful questions. Bring a list of at least ten questions to ask at the interview in case the interviewer answers many of them during your conversation. Your questions should show that you have a basic understanding of the company and have done your research. Do not ask questions that you can easily find the answer to on the company’s website. Possible questions to ask include:

- What events are you planning for the launch of your new product?
- Is there a typical day in this department?
- What skills and strengths would the ideal candidate for this job have?
- What are some of the immediate challenges facing the organization? What will my role be in facing these challenges?
- Tell me how your future fundraising strategies will change with the new director?
- What opportunities for growth do you offer?
- Tell me about the culture of the organization. What kind of personality best fits the office?
- What questions do you have for me that we haven’t addressed today?
- Can you describe the management team and how decisions are made at that level?
- How does the firm recognize and learn from a brave attempt that did not turn out as expected?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process? Do you have a general time frame in mind?
- Is there any additional information you need from me to make a decision?

**Be ready to talk about your salary expectations, but do not bring it up yourself.** Research the salary range for the field and location ahead of time. Use Payscale.com, Salary.com, professional organizations’ websites, and informational interviews. If you’re asked about your salary expectations, give a range that you are comfortable with based on your research. A good answer is “I’m aware that the typical range for this kind of position is ____ to ____ , and I’d like to be at the higher end of the range given my related skills and experience.” This answer is positive and assertive but still non-demanding enough to leave room for negotiation.

**Review your Facebook, LinkedIn and other social networking profiles.** Google yourself. Many employers do the same and may make hiring decisions based on what they see as well as what is missing. Set your Facebook and other social internet profiles to private so you can control what people see. Your LinkedIn profile should be set to public so employers can see your professional side. Remember, your first impression happens before you even walk in the door.

**Practice, Practice, Practice**

**Interviewers aren’t just looking for “the right answer,” they’re looking for a good fit.** Personality, enthusiasm and confidence are often deal makers and breakers in an interview. Talking about yourself and your experience with confidence builds the likeability factor that employers look for. With practice, answering questions becomes easier and more natural, so try the following:
Attend an interview workshop.
Write out answers to commonly asked interview questions.
Practice answering questions out loud—thinking about answers doesn’t help when you’re going to be answering them verbally.
Practice with your family, friends or a career coach.
Highlight the skills on your resume that fit with the position you are interviewing for.

Practice answering questions with specific examples from your past experience. In the workplace, past behavior is the best predictor of future performance. Practice using phrases like, “Let me give you an example…”, “My former supervisor always complimented me on…” and “For instance, when I…”. Use concrete examples with quantifiable information that prove results from jobs, internships and volunteering.

Practice getting to the point. If asked, “Tell me about yourself,” focus right away on job-related qualities and your interest in the position. Do not repeat the information that is already on your resume. An interviewer asking “How did you choose to move to L.A.?” wants to hear how you make important decisions, not every detail of your cross country move. Practice speaking without a lot of “ums,” “uhs,” “likes”, or “you knows.”

The Interview

An interview is a two-way conversation. It is your opportunity to evaluate an employer, position, and work setting to see if the fit is right for you. Without being too casual, try to relax and be yourself during the interview. Employers want to see your personality as well as your qualifications, and you want to see theirs.

Arrive early. Arriving ten to fifteen minutes early shows that you are organized and manage time efficiently; any earlier will be an inconvenience for the staff. Be sure to have clear directions, including information on parking and security. Doing a dry-run on a workday can help you plan and prepare for travel.

Bring along a nice padfolio, resumes and list of references. Have enough copies of your resume for everyone you are meeting and one for yourself that you have highlighted or notated with important skills you want to mention. Your reference list should have the same heading as your resume and contain your name, company, title, and contact information for three to five references. The padfolio should have a list of the questions you plan on asking and keywords to remind you to talk about specific accomplishments. If you absolutely must take notes during the interview, do so sparingly. One important time to do this is during introductions. Write down the interviewers names, titles and where they are seated at the table. Be sure to focus your full attention on the people with whom you’re talking.

Put together a portfolio to highlight your accomplishments. When possible, bring multiple copies that you are able to leave behind. A simple folder with sheet protectors filled with samples of your work is fine. Be creative and include things that are important to your field such as:

- Lesson plans
- PowerPoint presentations
- Websites
- Brochures
- Letters of recommendation
- Thank-you notes
- Writing samples
• Awards
• Testimonies from clients
• Publications
• Resume
• References
• Military records
• Volunteer and community service work information
• Photographs
• Grant proposals

Be prepared for a little “small talk” at the beginning of the interview. Whenever you meet someone new in a professional setting, there is usually talk of the weather, current events or local news. Be aware and remember, the likeability factor starts here.

Convey passion, enthusiasm, confidence and motivation! Stand, smile, make eye contact and shake hands firmly. Remember, they have asked you to interview—they liked your resume and are prepared to like you.

Stay on topic. Be direct in answering questions. Don’t babble on or veer off course. Be friendly and outgoing, but don’t tell jokes or flirt with the interviewer. Don’t be afraid to pause and think about a question before answering—sometimes less is more.

Be aware of body language. Sit up straight and listen actively—lean forward slightly, nod and smile. Don’t fidget, tap your feet, play with a pen or gesture excessively.

Emphasize the positive. Don’t volunteer information about your weaknesses, but be prepared for questions about them. Never speak negatively about previous experiences, former employers, professors, or supervisors. Instead, explain the situation briefly and emphasize what you learned.

Expect the unexpected. If you trip on the rug or a button flies off your jacket, if the interviewer spills her coffee or the phone rings, maintain your composure and sense of humor. Interviewers have different styles—most are pleasant and supportive but a few may seem rude or confrontational. Stand your ground and show you can handle the situation.

Interviewers often ask behavioral questions to probe relevant skills. In a behavioral interview, an employer has decided what skills they need for the job and the questions you will be asked will be geared to finding out if you have those skills. The interviewer wants to know how you handled a situation, rather than just gathering information about you. For a marketing job you might be asked, “What would your marketing plan be for xxx product?” For a customer service job: “What would you do if a client were rude to you?” or “Tell me about the most difficult customer you’ve ever dealt with.”

To prepare for behavioral questions, review the job description and your resume. What specific skills, experiences and qualities is the employer looking for and what specific examples and accomplishments from your resume address these needs? Practice telling your stories as part of your preparation. It may help to use the STAR technique as you prepare:

• Situation: What was the situation or problem?
• Task: What needed to be done? How were you involved?
• Action: What did you do? What was your specific role?
• Result: What were the outcomes? What did you learn or wish you’d done differently?

Sometimes illegal or inappropriate questions are asked on an interview about age, ethnicity, religion, race, citizenship, military record, sexual orientation, marital status, arrest record and/or disabilities. The questions might be, “Do you have a partner?” “Are you planning to have a family?” or
“How old are you?” You can refuse to answer, or ask why the question is relevant. You can just answer the question if you choose, or address what you think is the underlying issue. For example, the question “Do you have a partner?” may be the interviewer’s clumsy way of asking if you work evenings, weekends or if you can travel. You can say, “I’m aware of the time commitment needed, and I can assure you I’m quite willing to put in the hours needed to do an excellent job.”

Never leave an interview with an uneasy “I wish I had said…” feeling. Some good closing questions and actions:

- Is there anything about my background and experience that we didn’t cover today that would be helpful for you to know?
- What is the next step in the process?
- Thank the interviewer for his/her time, and shake everyone’s hand before you leave—make eye contact and convey confidence.
- Be prepared if your interviewer ends the interview with, “Is there anything else we should know about you?” Have a succinct and enthusiastic summary of your qualifications ready.

Ask for the business card of each person who interviews you. You could also ask your interview host for a list of your interviewers. If you forget, ask the receptionist as you leave. You’ll need this for your thank-you notes.

Dress for Success

Be remembered for what you said, not what you wore. What you wear will be your first impression, so choose wisely and sell the image you want. Observe people in the field and dress one notch above them. When in doubt, err on the conservative side. Avoid short skirts, tight or revealing tops, large patterns, distracting jewelry and club-scene shoes.

Dress appropriately for the field. Business interviews generally call for a conservative skirt or pants suit, minimal jewelry, skin-toned hose and simple shoes. Some fields allow for more relaxed attire including advertising, PR, publishing, the arts, non profits and teaching. A blazer, blouse or sweater set and tailored skirt or pants suit are appropriate. You can add a scarf or jewelry for interest and color. If you have visible tattoos, nose rings, brightly dyed hair or body piercings, think about whether they’ll fit in with the particular work environment.

Impeccable grooming, always. Make sure to have clean and neatly groomed hair and nails, no perfume, subtle make-up and fresh breath (but no gum or mints during the interview), and don’t forget the deodorant. If you’re a smoker, be sure to wear smoke-free clothing to your interview.

After the Interview

Send thank-you notes and requested information within 24 hours. Whenever possible, send handwritten thank-you notes to every person you met during your interview. If you know they will be making a decision quickly, an emailed thank you is acceptable. Mention your interest in the position and organization, reference a conversation you had, offer an idea you have for the business and show your enthusiasm. Make sure to write different things in each note or email, as the recipients will most likely compare them. Keep it short but sincere and make a copy for your files. It is also a good idea to send a follow-up note to anyone at the organization who has assisted you in your job search.

Other Types of Interviews

Phone Interviews. Employers in many fields initially screen applicants by phone, and sometimes the phone rings without warning. Some strategies for successful phone interviews:

- Be on a landline—avoid using a cell phone if possible.
- Turn off your call waiting.
- Be in a quiet place where you can concentrate and won’t be interrupted.
- Have your resume, list of accomplishments, job description, paper and pen in front of you.
- Write down the name of the person with whom you’re interviewing and refer to them by name to help build a connection.
- Smile—this will help convey enthusiasm.
- Your goal is to get a face-to-face interview. At the end of the phone interview, thank the interviewer and ask to meet in person.

**Skype interviews.** Skype interviews are becoming more commonplace as they are fast, easy and inexpensive. If you are not familiar with the technology, practice beforehand to get familiar with Skype. To succeed on a Skype interview:
- Be prepared—this is a real interview.
- Look at what is behind you before you start skyping. A blank wall is best.
- Keep eye contact. Look at the camera, not at the screen.
- Dress professionally as you would for an in-person interview.
- Be in a quiet place where you can concentrate and won’t be interrupted.
- Do a practice run to test audio and video.
- Add extra enthusiasm, as reactions translate differently on screen.

**Lunch or dinner interviews.** Many times an all-day interview will include a meal with employees. Remember that although it is a more relaxed time, you are still being interviewed. Order food that is easy to eat and allows you to talk. Treat your waiter well and be polite at all times. Avoid alcohol, even if your interviewer orders a drink. Brush up on dining etiquette beforehand as manners do matter.

**Group interviews.** Interview panels or committees are common in government, education and social service agencies. With more people in the room, make a connection by remembering and using people’s names. Address everyone at the table when responding, not just the person asking a question. If you seem to be talking with the highest-ranking person or the friendliest face, you may offend someone else. From time to time, scan the room; make eye contact with the less-engaged members. All are part of the hiring decision.

**Follow-up interviews.** Many employers ask candidates for second or even third interviews lasting all day and involving several interviewers. Depending on the field, you may be asked to make a presentation, teach a class or take a test. Ask what to expect before you get there. Some employers pay for follow-up interview travel, lodging and food expenses. Find out if the organization will make and pay for all your arrangements or if you’re expected to pay and be reimbursed. Be sure to keep all receipts and be conservative.

**Career fairs.** Career fairs are a popular way to make an initial connection with employers. Go to the fair armed with resumes, a smile and a positive attitude. Review the list of organizations beforehand. For those that interest you, know about the jobs available and research the organization. While you won’t have an official interview at the fair, first impressions count. Let the employer know what you have to offer and why the opportunity interests you. Dress for the fair as you would for an interview.

**Case interviews.** A case interview is a job interview in which the applicant is given a question, situation, problem or challenge and asked to resolve the situation. The case problem is often a business situation or a business case that the interviewer has worked on in real life. Consulting firms often use case interviews where the interviewer poses a problem or a question and asks the candidate to explain the steps she would take to solve it. The interviewer may not know the answer to the question but instead looks for problem-solving skills, logical reasoning, numerical agility, creativity
Sample Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- How did you hear about our company/organization?
- What do you know about our company and this position?
- What trends do you see in our field?
- What adjective would you use to describe yourself?
- How would your former supervisor or co-workers describe you?
- Do you consider yourself successful? Why?
- What do you think are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your career goals?
- Tell me about your volunteer work at ____. What did you enjoy most about it?
- What do you find most and least attractive about this position?
- Where do you expect to be in your career within five years? Ten years?
- Why should I hire you?
- How long would you stay with our organization?
- What skills, experience and training would you bring to this job?
- What are you most proud of about yourself?
- Give me an example of a team project you completed. What was your role? Was it successful?
- What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
- What was the last book you read, film you saw, or sporting event you attended?
- Describe your personality in three words.
- Why do you want to change careers?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Who is the most successful person you know? Why?
- What kind of salary expectations do you have?
- How well do you communicate in writing and orally?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why did you choose this type of career?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How do you evaluate success?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those supervised.
- Describe your most rewarding volunteer experience.
- What major professional problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- For what other types of positions are you interviewing?
- What gets you out of bed in the morning?
- Cite a situation from your past that required you to act under pressure. How did you deal with it?
- Describe a situation where you used persuasion to convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give me a specific example of a time you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Tell us what you did in your last job to build teamwork.
- How did you resolve conflict in the team?
- Convince me you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Describe a time on the job when you faced problems that tested your coping skills.
• Give an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
• Tell me about a time when you used your written communication skills to get a point across.
• Describe a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
• Tell me about an important goal that you had set in the past and your success in reaching it.
• Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
• Tell me about a time you went above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
• Give me an example of a time you were able to communicate successfully with another person even when that individual might not have liked you (or vice versa).
• Talk about some of the most significant memories you have had throughout your career and what it is that got you through those times.

Strange/Difficult Interview Questions
Sometimes you might get asked what seems to be a strange question on an interview. Here are some examples that Smithies have been asked on interviews:

• Are you a Trekkie?
• Tell me something about yourself that no one else will.
• If you were a vegetable what would you be?
• If asked how many ATMs there are in the city, how would you figure it out?
• Name a place (city, country etc) that best reflects your professional personality and why.
• If you could only have one thing on your resume, what would it be?
• Has anyone ever called you overconfident?
• Tell me how you would work with or get along with me.
• If you were a tree what kind of tree would you be?
• Your average length of employment at your jobs has been 2 years and 3 months. How do you explain that?
• What are you the most proud of in the past year? What were you most disappointed in?
• How would you transport six different colored sheep across a river?
• Please explain your analysis of our brand's advertising to my friend who has little knowledge of this business.
• Who are some notable alumnae from Smith?
• Do you like Civil Procedure enough that you would be willing to spend your career working on pre-trial motions in complex litigation?
• What good books have you read lately?
• Describe your experience at Smith.
• Please present, in no more than five minutes, how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
April 20, 2012

Jill Easton
Executive Director
Artists for Humanity
537 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 01234

Dear Ms. Easton:

Thank you for speaking with me yesterday about the public relations and development program assistant position at Artists for Humanity. I enjoyed hearing about the communications initiatives you’re launching at AFH and your interest in using new media to develop and broaden the organization’s audience and fundraising base.

I am excited about the prospect of contributing my public relations and technology skills to AFH’s important mission. With my strong communication, organizational, and database management experience, I believe I would be an asset to your public relations and development team. After thinking about our conversation further, a strong LinkedIn presence would tie in nicely with your communications initiative. By starting a LinkedIn group where professionals can interact with different artists, I believe your audience would grow organically and your fundraising would grow exponentially.

The writing samples you requested are attached. If I can provide further information, please contact me. Thank you again for your time yesterday. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Christine Smith