

ACE THAT

Interview



Ace that Interview!

Knowing how to successfully interview is one of the most crucial elements of a job search.

A great resume will land you an interview; but to land a job offer you need to distinguish yourself as the best possible fit for the job, supervisor, team and company during the interview.

Here's the Secret

The most qualified candidate (in terms of skills) is not the one who gets the job. The candidate who can communicate that they will be the most effective within the company's culture does. Employers assume that you have the basic skills to do the job – that is why they called you in for the interview.

Your mission on the interview is to convince them that you will:

- one** be wildly successful in the job
- two** fit in with and complement the team you will be working on
- three** be fully engaged and love working there

Before the interview

Learn about the company's culture.

A company's culture refers to the beliefs, attitudes, values, standards and behaviors that determine how employees interact with each other, customers and other partners. It is rooted in the mission, vision and corporate image of the company.

There are multiple ways to learn about a company's culture.

- read the mission, vision and values
- look at the annual report and notice what accomplishments are highlighted
- investigate how the CEO describes the company and its goals
- view the company's social media sites
- delve into the human resources website and view how the company engages and supports employees
- look at company reviews on websites such as LinkedIn and Glassdoor
- find a Smith alumna who has worked there (via the alumnae directory, LinkedIn or other social media) and ask for their feedback

Be ready to talk about your salary expectations, but do not bring it up yourself.

Research salary ranges using Payscale.com, Salary.com, professional associations and informational interviews. 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."

During the interview

An interview is a two-way conversation.

Without being too casual, try to relax and be yourself. Employers want to see your personality as well as your qualifications.

What to bring to an interview.

- Enough copies of your resume for everyone you are meeting and one for yourself.
 - A current reference list with the same heading as your resume and lists name, company, title, and contact information for three to five references.
 - A notepad with a list of the questions you plan on asking and keywords to remind you to talk about specific accomplishments.
- Write down names and titles of your interviewers and use their names throughout your time together.
- Put together a portfolio or folder with samples of your work that highlight your accomplishments. Be creative and include things that are important to your field such as lesson plans, Power Point presentations, writing samples, testimonies from customers, websites or grant proposals.

Sometimes illegal or inappropriate questions are asked during an interview

Some possible responses to questions about age, ethnicity, religion, race, citizenship, military record, sexual orientation, marital status, arrest record and/or disabilities:

- refuse to answer –
“I’m not comfortable answering that question”
- ask why the question is relevant –
“Can you explain how that relates to the job?”
- address what you think is the underlying issue –
“I assure you that I can handle the travel associated with this position”
- or just answer the question.

It’s up to you to determine if you think the interviewer is trying to discriminate against you, simply making small talk or trying to get at another issue. In deciding how to respond, you will want to take into consideration what you think the intent is of the question, how much you want the job, and how your response might hurt your prospects for getting it. Ultimately, you’ll have to decide the best course of action for the situation—but it’s good for you to know where the law stands.

Prepare questions to ask on the interviewer.

Your questions should show that you have done your research and are looking for a deeper understanding of whether or not this job is a good fit for you. Possible questions to ask include:

- In 10 words, how would you describe this team? This company?
- When you think about the top performers here, what are the strengths that most of them share?
- What are some of the immediate challenges facing the organization? What will my role be in facing these challenges?
- Can you describe the management team and how decisions are made at that level?
- What is the risk-tolerance of this team? What happens when someone takes a risk that does not turn out as expected?
- Around here, what’s really important?
- Is there anything in my background that we didn’t cover today that you’d like to know more about?

“The candidate who can communicate that they will be the most effective within the company’s culture gets the job.”

After the Interview

Send thank-you notes (hand-written or email) to each person you met with and any requested information within 24 hours. 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.

Other Types of Interviews

Phone Interviews.

Employers often screen applicants by phone, and sometimes the phone rings without warning. Some strategies for successful phone interviews:

- Move to a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
- Have your resume, list of accomplishments, job description, paper and pen with you.
- Use the name of the person you're speaking with to help build a connection.
- Stand up and smile—this will help convey confidence and 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 it. To succeed on a Skype interview:

- Be prepared—this is a real interview.
- Look at what is behind you before you start. A blank wall is best.
- Keep eye contact. Look at the camera, not at the screen.
- Dress as professionally as you would for an in-person interview.
- Be in a quiet place where you can concentrate and won't be interrupted.

10 Common Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Practice answering these questions with specific examples from your past experience. Use phrases like "Let me give you an example...", "My former supervisor always complimented me on..." and "For instance, when I..."

1. Tell me about yourself.

What the employer really wants to know is "tell me about your professional self because I'm trying to figure out if you fit with our company." This is not the time to regurgitate your entire resume or life history. Talk about 2-3 professional accomplishments or strengths that fit in with what the job you are interviewing for requires.

"I have always been told that I am a great..."

2. Why are you interested in our company and this position?

What the employer really wants to know is if you prepared for the interview and know about the company and the job. Be ready to talk about the mission of the company and what they are most proud of, and how that aligns with your personal values.

"I am personally drawn to work here because..."

3. What are you looking for in your next position?

What the employer really wants to know is if this is the position that you really want or if it is just the one that was available. Talk about how this position is the perfect one for you because it aligns with what you are looking for.

"I was so excited to hear about this particular job opening. It is exactly what I am looking for because..."

4. What are your top strengths? and weaknesses?

What the employer really wants to know is your level of self-awareness and honesty. Make sure the strength you choose aligns with the required skills for the job. For your weakness, choose something that will not be a major weakness for this position AND be sure to end with how you are working on improving in that area.

"My greatest strength is my ability to lead a team through change. I do this by..."

"A current weakness that I am working on is my presentation skills. I have taken a public speaking course..."

5. Give me an example of a difficult situation you have been in at work. What was your role? What was the outcome?

What the employer really wants to know is how you handle a stress at work. Talk about your stress reducing mechanisms and how you work through problems – go for a walk, to-do-lists, talking it through. Make sure to think of an example that had a positive outcome.

"Last year I was in charge of _____ and _____ happened..."

6. Describe your management / leadership style.

What the employer really wants to know is if you can lead a team in their environment. This is where knowing something about the work culture is key. The best managers are strong but flexible, able to motivate their team, set clear goals / expectations, provide good feedback, and measure the right outcomes.

"While every team needs a slightly different style, I tend to approach my employee relationships as a coach..."

7. Tell me about a time you went above and beyond to get a job done.

What the employer really wants to know is that you are willing to do what it takes, even if it is not part of your job description. Give an example where you were asked to do something last minute, complete a task for another colleague or do something completely outside of your typical duties. Make sure the example was something that was considered a success by your company.

"Last year a colleague was out on leave and I was asked to..."

8. Why are you leaving your current job?

What the employer really wants to know is if you are leaving on good terms and that you are looking for a better fit. Keep things positive and talk about your excitement to take on more responsibility or change careers. If you were let go, keep it simple and admit it, but add that it was the wrong fit for you at the time.

"I'm looking for a new opportunity that aligns with my..."

9. What are you the most proud of in the past year?

What the employer really wants to know is what you feel your biggest professional accomplishment is. A good way to answer this is to use the STAR method. State the: (1) Situation or problem, (2) Task or what needed to be done, (3) Action or what you did, and (4) Result or outcome.

"In my current role I was in charge of decreasing the budget..."

10. How would you transport six different colored sheep across a river?

How many ATM's are there in Washington, DC?

How many tennis balls can fit in a limo?

What the employer really wants to know is how you process information. They want to hear that you have a logical and systematic way to proceed and are willing to ask questions to clarify the situation.

"Now that is a great question. I'd start by..."

Interview Prep Sheet

Company _____ Position _____ Date / Time _____

Who I am meeting with and their title _____

What I love about this company _____

What appeals to me about this position _____

My top 3-5 skills and strengths that align with this job _____

My top 3-5 accomplishments I want to highlight _____

A weakness of mine and how I am working on it _____

3-5 Questions I am going to ask _____

