

INTERVIEWING GUIDE

The University of Akron



The University of Akron
Career Center

Student Union 211
(330) 972-7747
<http://www.uakron.edu/career>

Connecting You to Your Career Success

The University of Akron is an equal education and employment institution

The Main Event of the Job Search: INTERVIEWING!

This Interviewing Guide will give you information, techniques, and checklists to help you prepare for your interviews. As you go through the preparation process, keep in mind:

- **Interviewing is a skill.** Like any other skill, you will improve through practice.
- **Interviewing is a two-way street.** You are also interviewing a potential employer and are looking for a best “fit.” What is “fit?” “Fit” is finding a job that you enjoy, work that is meaningful, positive, or interesting, colleagues who are good team members, and overall an organization that reflects your own values.

How do You Get an Interview?

Employers select candidates to interview from applications received or from strong referrals from a colleague. Before selecting candidates to interview, some employers will ask applicants to complete a fitness test, background check (including credit rating, drug screening, license points, arrest record, etc.), reference check, personality test, or qualification test. Every organization has a unique hiring process. **Pay attention to deadlines and respond to requests for information professionally and promptly.**

If a company likes your potential on paper (your resume, cover letter, and/or application), they will typically call or email you and invite you to interview. Some organizations will negotiate an interview date based on your schedule. Some organizations only interview on specific dates and times.

If you find you are sending out many resumes and cover letters, and are not receiving invitations to interview, your paper work may need some assistance. Contact the Career Center to meet with a career adviser to review your resume, cover letter, and job search strategies.

Preparing for Your Interview

Before your interview, there are three important keys to effectively prepare yourself to “shine” in the interview:

1. **Know Yourself:** How well do you fit the job description? What are the skills, abilities, and qualities you have that can benefit that organization? Why are you the best fit for that job within that organization?
2. **Dress the Part:** Do you look the part of a professional? Are you conveying a first impression that is polished, positive, credible, and confident?
3. **Do the Research:** What do you know about the job and the organization? What are the organization’s main services or products, primary values, culture? Is the organization financially stable?

Do You Know the Types of Interviews?

When you are invited to an interview, be sure to ask what type of interview you will have with the potential employer. Take a moment to review this list of different types of interviews, so you are prepared for what may come your way.

| Type of Interview | What is it? | What is the purpose of this interview? |
|--|--|--|
| One-on-one | The candidate and one interviewer. Can have multiple one-on-one interviews with various employees within one day of interviewing. | Experienced interviewers can determine your “fit” with their organization in less than 5 minutes. Gives the candidate an opportunity to meet with someone in the organization and explore the job. |
| Screening | A 15-30 minute interview, usually one-on-one, used to “screen” candidates to determine who to invite for a second or additional interviews. Some are held on campus, so reference the job database. Contact the Career Center! | Efficient way to quickly screen candidates. Allows employers to weed out candidates who look good on paper, but have difficulty communicating or who are not a good fit for the company or job. |
| Phone | Phone interviews can be one-on-one, or with multiple people via a speaker phone. | Often used as a screening interview. Also used to cut down on interview travel expenses. |
| Situational, Behavioral, or Competency-based | Candidates are asked questions that involve scenarios to gauge the level of skills, knowledge, or abilities that are directly related to the job. Questions may include “How have you or would you handle?” Or “Give an example when you” (Specifically what did you do?). | Your answer should follow a “STAR” format: Situation: describe the situation. Task: give specifics on the task(s). Actions: describe your actions. Results: give details on the results. |
| Second (or third, etc.) | The top candidates from the screening interviews are invited to the organization for additional interviews. May involve any of the interview types, and can be a half or full day of interviewing. | Second interviews are usually much more in depth, which give the employer and interviewee more time to get to know each other. Final decisions on who to hire are typically based on these interviews. |
| Panel | A team of interviewers (2 or more) together interview one candidate. | Allows multiple perspectives on one candidate. Sometimes team interviewers will take on pre-assigned questions. |
| Task or Technical | Candidates are asked to complete a written test or task related to the skills or knowledge needed to do this job. | Used when there is a specific task, skill, or ability that is essential to effective job performance. |
| Presentation | Candidates are asked to prepare and give a presentation on a specific topic, which is then evaluated as part of the interview. | If the employer needs someone with strong presentation or communication skills, this is one method to evaluate a candidate’s skills. |
| Meal or Social Situation | Candidates are interviewed while also dining. Check the Career Center’s website for information on our annual Dining Etiquette events. | A meal or cocktail reception gives the employer the opportunity to see how you interact in a social situation. Remember your manners, and do not drink alcohol during your interview. |

Preparing for the interview: Your Checklist

Once you receive the call or email inviting you for an interview, your preparation work begins. The following checklist can assist you:

| Task | Resources |
|---|--|
| Practice interview questions | Call the Career Center to set up a mock interview, and/or ask friends/family/faculty to do mock interviews with you. |
| Research the organization, understand the posted job description | Complete in-depth research on the organization, know the job description, and how you fit their needs. This is a very important step of preparation. Most candidates do not do the depth of research necessary; if you do the research, you will shine in the interview. |
| Research yourself | “Google” yourself to see what is out there about you on the internet. If you have a “facebook” or “myspace” account, click to make the viewing of your page “private” and check that all aspects of your page conveys a professional image. |
| Make a list of your questions | From your research and the job description, you should have a few questions regarding the company and the job. |
| Check interview suit, shoes, and other attire | Suit and shirt/blouse should be clean, pressed, and professional. Hair should be clean, groomed, conservatively styled. Remove multiple piercings, cover visible tattoos. An interview is not the time to worry about style trends; go with a more traditional interviewing suit in basic blue, black, or grey. |
| Review and (if necessary) update your resume. Print 2-5 copies of your resume on resume paper | Be sure your updated resume is also uploaded to the Career Center’s job database. Print out and bring copies of your resume on resume paper (available at any office supply store). |
| Do a “dry run” practice drive to the interview location | If you are driving to your interview, do a practice drive, preferably near the same time of day you will be driving to your interview (helps you gauge traffic). This is especially important if you have never been to the interview location before. Note the length of time it takes to drive. You want to arrive at least 15 minutes early for your interview. |
| Consider buying a portfolio notebook or use a briefcase | Portfolio notebooks have pockets for resumes, pad of paper, place for pen, and storage for other items. |
| If you have a lunch or dinner interview, practice your dining etiquette | You are being interviewed during this meal, and your social skills are being assessed as well as your professional skills. Need some help? Consider attending one of the Career Center’s Etiquette events to polish up your dining etiquette. |
| The night before the interview, lay-out what you will take with you, and a note to turn off your cell phone during your interview | Take a list of questions, copies of your resume (on resume paper), mints, list of references, a copy of your UA transcript, and a calendar (you may need to set another interview date or work start date). |
| Consider bringing an “Interview Portfolio” of your achievements | During an interview, you may find it helpful to “show and tell” about your achievements, which can be done if you bring a brief “Interview Portfolio” of work directly related to the skills, knowledge, or abilities needed to do this job. |

Since interviewing is a two-way experience, you will need to prepare questions to ask the potential employer. While you are doing your research on the potential employer, take note of questions that come to mind. Below is a list of other questions you might want to ask during your interview. Most interviewers will end the interview with question #45 (see above), and you should have at least one question prepared. Why? Asking questions shows your interest in the employer and the job, plus questions help you gather more information so you can make an informed career decision.

Questions You May Want to Ask...

- What would an average day on the job entail?
- What type of training is provided for new employees?
- How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
- What are the top 3 goals of your department for the next year or near future?
- What are the biggest challenges about this job?
- What do you enjoy about working at this organization?
- Is this a new position or replacement?

Here's a List of Things to Avoid on an Interview...

- Arriving late. That gives the employer a good reason not to hire you.
- Seeming over-eager or desperate.
- Being too humble about your accomplishments.
- Being too ego-centric about your accomplishments.
- Criticizing previous employers or coworkers.
- Asking questions to which you should or do already know the answer.
- Asking about the salary and benefits before you receive a solid job offer.
- Elaborating on unnecessary details, or rambling.
- Wearing unprofessional attire, heavy cologne, too much make-up, not bathing, showing multiple piercings, and/or unusual tattoos.
- Assuming because you have earned a degree, that you are entitled to the job.
- Answering the cell phone! Make sure to turn it off!

Hey, That's Illegal!

U.S. law protects certain classes of potential employees from discrimination in certain types of employment. In a perfect world, employers would make hiring decisions based on what skills, abilities, and knowledge someone would need to do a specific job. Since we live in an imperfect world, there are still some employers who have preconceived notions about who can best do a job. Typically, if you are asked an "illegal" question by an employer—questions about your race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age (if over 40)—it is being asked out of ignorance of the law.

Should I refuse to answer the question? You can do so gracefully by simply asking "Could you tell me how that fits in with the job requirements?"

Looking the Part of a Future Employee

For any job interview, you want to convey that you can do the job. One way you convey the message “I am a professional and I am ready for this job,” is by how you dress.

For your interview, you want to dress conservatively, typically in a dark suit. Through your research, you will know the type of organization or company culture with which you are interviewing, and sometimes the interview attire may be more relaxed. **Always**, regardless of industry or career, dress professionally.

Confused about what is “professional attire?” Be sure to attend the Career Center’s annual “What to Wear” fashion event. Stop in to the Career Center’s office for more information on the event.

What to wear for an interview

| | Women | Men |
|------------------|--|--|
| Suit | Preferably navy blue or charcoal (traditional suit colors) skirt or pant suit. | Preferably navy blue or charcoal (traditional suit colors) suit with matching blazer and pants. |
| Shirt or Blouse | Complementary color to suit, avoid low-cut or any features that detract from your professional image. | White or light blue dress shirt, button down or spread collar. If shirt is somewhat sheer, consider wearing undershirt. |
| Tie or Scarf | | Tie in complementary color(s) to your suit. |
| Hair | Should be neatly and conservatively styled. Avoid playing with or touching hair during interview. | Conservative length, neatly styled, and most employers prefer no facial hair. If you keep your facial hair, be sure it is clean and neatly trimmed. |
| Socks/Hose | A color matching your suit, or natural color hose. | Dark colored dress socks that match your suit. When you sit down, skin should not be visible above your socks. |
| Shoes | Polished plain pumps, dark or matching color, closed toe and heel, no higher than 2” heel. | Polished dark dress shoes, no boots. |
| Accessories | Limit accessories to no more than one of each: earring per ear, necklace, ring, and watch. Remove any rings or studs from piercings (other than one earring per ear) and cover up visible tattoos. | Limit accessories to no more than a tie tack, watch, one ring, and cuff links. Remove any earrings or studs with piercings and cover up visible tattoos. |
| Personal Hygiene | Clean and polished fingernails, minimal or no fragrance. Bring breath mints. Do not chew gum in your interview. | |
| Other | Do not bring a cell phone to the interview. If you must bring it with you, turn it off. Smokers: To keep your suit smelling clean, do not smoke while in your interview suit. If necessary, use nicotine gum to get you through the interview day. | |

The Little Things Count During and After Your Interview

When an employer needs to choose among equally well-qualified candidates, the little things can set you above and apart from the other candidates. What are those little things?

- Treat everyone you talk with at the organization -- from the janitor to the CEO -- with the same level of dignity and respect.
- Greet everyone you meet with a smile and a firm handshake, introduce yourself by your full name.
- Convey genuine enthusiasm and energy about this career opportunity.
- Focus on the job and organization, not the pay (never ask about salary until you have a firm job offer in hand).
- Be interested in what others have to say, ask questions, use appropriate humor.
- After each interview, ask the individual for a business card, jot notes on the back of the card to help you remember some of your discussions, and use this information to write your thank you notes.
- If you decide to accept another job offer, or otherwise want to remove yourself from consideration for a job, gracefully let the employer know you are removing yourself from candidacy for the position by phoning that employer. Do not “burn any bridges,” as this employer could potentially hire you in the future.
- Within 24 hours of your interview, write a thank you note to every person with whom you interacted during your interview. That includes the receptionist, especially if s/he was helpful to you or helped to arrange the details of your interview day.
- In your thank you letter, follow up with any information that shows you are the best “fit” for the job and the organization.

Example Thank You Letter

1313 Mockingbird Lane
Akron, OH 44325

Julia Boxer
Coordinator, Perfect Job, Inc.
1111 W. Market St.
Akron, OH 44313

May 25, 2013

Dear Ms. Boxer:

(Paragraph #1: This paragraph should include a thank you for your interview, and convey your enthusiasm for the job opportunity). Thank you for taking the time to interview me yesterday for the position of Thank You Letter Writer with Perfect Job, Inc. After meeting with you and the rest of your staff, I am very excited about the possibility of working with you and the Perfect Job organization.

(Paragraph #2: In this paragraph, you can reiterate your qualifications, follow up on information or questions, include information you forgot to convey during your interview, or otherwise show you are a good “fit” for this job and organization). In our interview, you mentioned that the first priority of this job would be to create a database of letters that could be used by your clients. My experiences in both desktop publishing and web development would give me the skills to make an immediate impact in getting this information up and out to your clients quickly and efficiently. In addition, I believe my team work and leadership skills would allow me to become an effective and contributing member of the staff team.

(Paragraph #3: Thank the interviewer again, include a next step, and a professional closing). Again, thank you for your time and consideration in interviewing me for the Thank You Letter Writer position. If you need any additional information regarding my candidacy, please feel free to contact me at 330-555-1313 or by email at hireme@uakron.edu. Good luck to you and your staff in selecting the best candidate for this position with Perfect Job. Of course, I hope that I will hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Zippy Mascot

Zippy Mascot

Free Mock Interviews!

Since interviewing is a skill, you will improve with practice. The Career Center staff can assist you with a practice interview, and then critique your interviewing performance. Call 330-972-7747 to schedule a practice interview.

Free Access to the Career Center's Job Database and Interviews with On-Campus Recruiters!

Did you know that employers from all types of organizations conduct hundreds of interviews every year in the Career Center? Employers come to The University of Akron and the Career Center because they know they will find qualified and talented students and alumni. If you have an account on the Career Center's job database, you can see the list of employers coming to campus, and apply for an interview time (yes, these are **real** job interviews!). Plus you will have access to over 40,000 job postings from career centers throughout the United States, as well as postings from Careerbuilder, HotJobs, and Dice. Don't have an account on the Career Center's job database yet? Call the Career Center and set up an appointment with a career adviser. **Accounts on the Career Center's job database are free to currently enrolled students.**

You can also contact our office to set up an appointment with one of our career advisers:

Career Center
The University of Akron
Student Union 211
Akron, OH 44325-4306
330-972-7747
career@uakron.edu

"Chance favors the prepared mind."
--Louis Pasteur