

Effective Interviewing



**Career Services
Ohio Wesleyan University
HWCC 324
740-368-3152
careers@owu.edu
<http://careers.owu.edu>**

Strengthening Your Interviewing Skills

Hiring decisions are heavily influenced by your interview, as this is the organization's best opportunity to investigate your interpersonal skills and fit with its culture.

Interviewing blunders can undermine your job search success. Therefore, read on for some ways to strengthen your position within the interviewing process as well as more common errors you should work to avoid.



The Value of a Liberal Arts Education

Several skills are typically gained through a liberal arts education that employers and graduate schools value, including . . .

Decision Making Capabilities

Critical Thinking Skills

Time Management Strategies

Writing Skills

Stress Management

Ability to Work Independently

Organizational Experience

Research Techniques

Presentation Skills

Creativity

Teamwork

Leadership

Take some time to think about which of these skills you have cultivated and could apply successfully in a work or graduate school setting. When have you used these skills? How have you applied them? What have the results been of your efforts? Thinking about concrete examples of these skills will help you focus on your strengths and what you have to offer a potential employer or graduate school. This reflection is an important component of preparing for your interview.



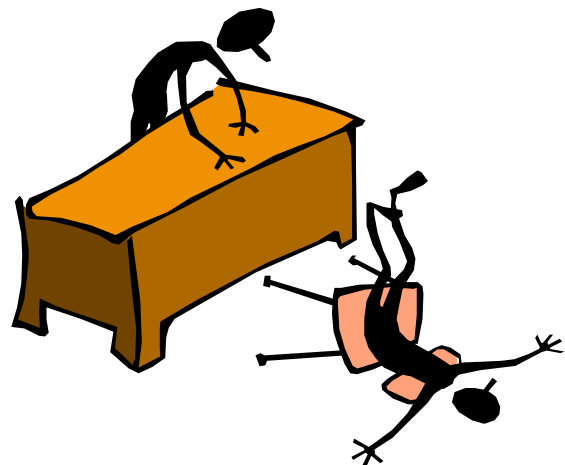
Characteristics Interviewers Typically Seek in Candidates

Enthusiasm	Self Confidence
Initiative	Ability to Handle Pressure
Motivation	Organizational Skills
Flexibility	Oral Communication Skills
Intelligence	Leadership Potential
Professionalism	Interpersonal Skills
Assertiveness	Written Communication Skills



Reasons Why Interviewers Reject Applicants

Poor personal appearance
Lack of interest and enthusiasm
Little understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses
Lack of solid career planning (goals and objectives are vague)
No insight into the nature of the organization or graduate school
Failure to maintain appropriate eye contact with the interviewer while conversing
Being late for the interview
Lack of questions about the job or organization
Overbearing, overaggressive, “know-it-all” attitude
Inability to express oneself clearly (poor volume, diction, or grammar)
Unwilling to start at the bottom—expects too much too soon
Complains or speaks poorly about past employers/positions
Lack of confidence and poise
Overemphasis on salary and money
Lack of tact, maturity
Little sense of humor
Lack of knowledge of field
Low moral standards
Lazy
Intolerant, has strong prejudices
Narrow interests
Inability to take criticism
Unwilling to relocate



Before the Interview

Preparation is critical for a strong performance in any interview. Be prepared to convince the interviewer that you should be hired or accepted into the graduate school, and also plan to provide solid reasons why you want to join the organization. Ohio Wesleyan on-campus recruiters have indicated interviewing skills, preparation for interview, and knowledge of career goals as the biggest candidate weaknesses. This preparation time and process is VERY important!

Prior to the actual interview, you should:

ENGAGE IN SELF-ASSESSMENT

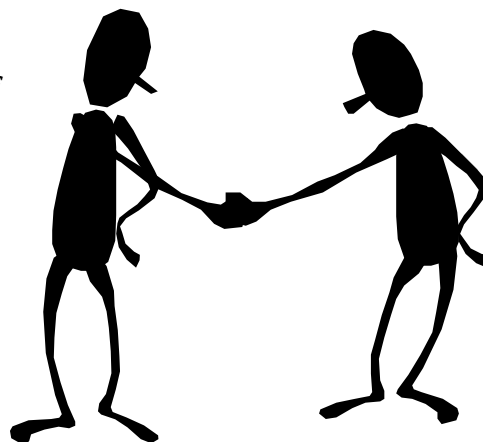
- Reflect on the skills and abilities you possess that would be valuable to the employer or graduate program. Remember to specifically review the job or program description and analyze how your skills and abilities fit with what they are seeking.
- Know why you are interested in the organization or graduate program. It is important to be able to articulate how your education and experience fit with this opportunity. Be ready to communicate how you are unique and can help the organization/program.
- ***Practice by scheduling a videotaped mock interview in the Career Services office!*** Review the sample list of questions prior to participating in the mock interview and think of specific examples to demonstrate your skills.

RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER OR GRADUATE SCHOOL

- Research the employer to learn more about the products, philosophies, reputation of the organization and current events. For graduate programs, be familiar with the curriculum, program requirements, department reputation and faculty research interests, as well as current issues in your field.
- Prepare a few questions to ask the interviewer to learn more about the organization, preferably ones which reflect your preparation and knowledge about the organization/program and will help you make decisions about your continued interest in their offering.

PLAN LOGISTICS

- Verify basics: time, date, location, and directions for your interview.
- If possible, find out the format of the interview and the number of interviewers involved so you will be prepared.
- Stock your portfolio with extra copies of your resume on resume paper, sheets of your list of references with contact information, a list of questions you want to ask, and examples of your work.
- Plan what you will wear and ask for advice if uncertain about appropriate professional attire.
- Arrive early and take care of a few basics: go to the restroom, get a drink (and dry your hands if you have sweaty palms!).



During the Interview

Opportunity knocks and now is your chance to market yourself! Remember that there are three parts of the actual interview and that this is a two-way exchange of information and decision making. The interviewer decides whether or not to make you an offer, but you also will then have a decision to make. Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether or not this opportunity is a fit for you, too. Remember that you are *interviewing the entire time*—everyone you meet may have the opportunity to provide feedback on your interview, so always maintain your professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

- Greet your interviewer(s) with a firm handshake, good eye contact and a smile. Wait until you are asked to be seated. Remember that first impressions are VERY important, so be sure to project your best and most professional image.
- Let the interviewer lead you into the process: usually a question or comment about your trip or the weather will be used to help you get comfortable and relax. The interviewer then may explain how he/she plans to conduct the interview.

BODY

- The interviewer will ask you questions regarding your skills, abilities, and interests. Use specific examples of your experiences when responding to these inquiries because past behaviors are an indicator of future performance. Become masterful at communicating your background by choosing vivid and interesting examples that demonstrate your skills.
- The interviewer will also evaluate your non-verbal communication, so maintain good eye contact, listen closely to the questions, don't move nervously (such as shifting in your seat, playing with a ring on your finger, tapping your foot). Maintain your verbal and non-verbal enthusiasm!
- If you lack a qualification or skill, don't be defensive. Instead, sell your potential for developing that skill.
- If necessary, take the time to reflect or ask for clarification before responding to a question.
- Be prepared to ask questions, perhaps based upon what you have learned through your research. You may want to print your questions out to avoid forgetting something—this also shows thoughtful preparation. Check out the list of sample questions toward the end of this booklet for ideas.
- DO NOT ask something that you should have known from doing some basic research on the company or graduate school.
- DO NOT ask WIIFM (What's in it for me) questions until you have an offer! (Examples include: salary, benefits, vacation.)

CLOSING

- The interviewer might tell you what the next step in the process is and when you can expect to hear from them again. If not, ask "what is the next step in your selection process?"
- Have a brief summary statement prepared to indicate to the employer why you would be the best choice for the position, and if you want the job, express your interest directly.
- Again, give a firm handshake to conclude the interview. Thank the interviewer for his or her time, and request a business card.

After the Interview

Many candidates believe that once the interview has occurred there is nothing left to do except wait to hear of the decision about their status. However, there are a few things that one should do after every interview.

SELF ANALYSIS

- Reflect on the interview. What did you do well? What do you want to improve in your next interview?
- Write down your impressions of the organization/school/position.

FOLLOW UP WITH EMPLOYER/GRADUATE SCHOOL

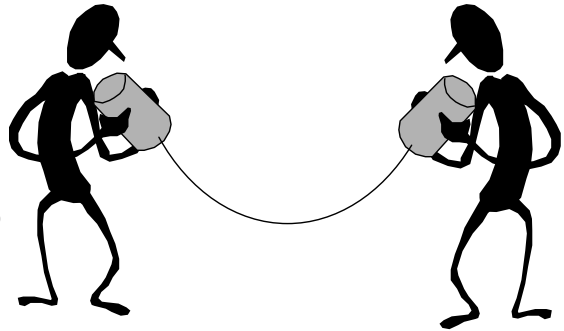
- Within 24 hours, write a thank you letter to the interviewer(s) which is personalized by recalling something the interviewer shared with you that you appreciated. If you are, in fact, still interested, express your desire to be a part of the organization and mention the skills that you would contribute if you became a part of their team. If your primary mode of communication with the interviewer has been through e-mail, you may want to send your thank you electronically.
- If you have not heard from the employer/graduate school within the time frame mentioned during the interview, re-contact the interviewer by letter or, if appropriate, a phone call or e-mail. Express your continued interest, and indicate that you are looking forward to hearing from them again soon.



Phone Interviews

REASONS FOR A PHONE INTERVIEW

- Provides a method of screening candidates to narrow the pool before inviting candidates for an on-site interview.
- Gives the recruiter a chance to analyze your communication skills.
- Allows the interviewer to evaluate your ability to convey ideas or concepts effectively.
- Provides a quicker, less formal interaction.



CHALLENGES SPECIFIC TO A PHONE INTERVIEW

- It is not possible to read or convey body language.
- Prevents you from making a positive impression through physical appearance, posture, firm handshake, and direct eye contact.
- Makes it more difficult to assess the way the interview is going by noticing visual cues to your responses.
- Increases the need to acknowledge understanding/agreement through verbal communication, as opposed to visual/physical expression.
- Makes it easy to slip into an informal mode of expression during the interview.

ADVANTAGES OF A PHONE INTERVIEW

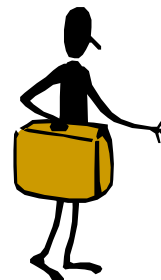
- You can refer to your notes and resume during the interview.
- You can wear comfortable clothes that help you relax, or dress up to be in the interview mindset.
- Familiar surroundings help you focus better.
- Allows you to demonstrate your verbal communication (telephone) skills.

TIPS TO HELP YOU WITH THE INTERVIEW

- Smile; it will come through in your voice.
- Ensure that the recording on your answering machine does not cause you embarrassment.
- Choose a time and location without other distractions.
- Be concise. You have less time to talk.
- Prepare for the interview. You can conduct a mock phone interview with an advisor in Career Services.
- Try to schedule a future time for the interview rather than doing it when initially contacted.
- Be aware of your voice, your language, and the way you phrase your sentences.
- Avoid the use of words such as “like, yaa, aaa, umm, you know.” Be direct in conveying what you mean.
- Remember to ask for the name and contact information of the interviewer.
- Send the interviewer a thank you letter the next day, referring to details from the conversation you had and reinforcing your interest in the position/program.

On-Site Interviews

If a company or graduate school invites you for an interview “to see their organization or program,” they are very interested in you as a candidate. Be confident that you have made a positive impression in your written application and any previous conversations or interviews, and continue to market your strengths.



ARRANGEMENTS

- Get the details in writing: name, title, business address, phone number of trip coordinator.
- Details of travel arrangements (sometimes you will have to locate your own lodging).
- WHERE you are supposed to be, WHEN, and WHO you should ask to see upon arrival (be sure to obtain accurate directions to the location).

TRIP EXPENSES

- Every organization has different policies relevant to providing monetary support for your visit. Obtain the details from the person who invited you for the interview.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

- Refresh your memory of earlier interviews and conduct more research on the organization.
- Practice your interviewing skills again.
- Stock your briefcase/portfolio with examples of your work, transcripts, references.
- Remember to pack your itinerary and information outlining the details of your visit.

BE PREPARED & AWARE

- Dress professionally as if you were part of the environment (including graduate school interviews).
- Everyone you meet is interviewing you. Even the secretaries will give feedback.
- Be aware of your table manners during meals.
- When making small talk, try to avoid controversial topics such as politics or religion.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR

- What is the impression that you receive regarding the morale of the people there?
- Are they genuinely glad to meet you, and do they make you feel welcome?
- Do you feel comfortable in this environment?
- Are your questions answered honestly, with conflicting responses, or avoided?

AFTER THE VISIT

- Send a thank you letter even if you have decided that the place is not a “fit” for you.
- If you need to know where you stand in order to respond to other offers, do not hesitate to call and explain that you are still interested in this organization but need to respond to pending offers.

AN OFFER DURING THE VISIT

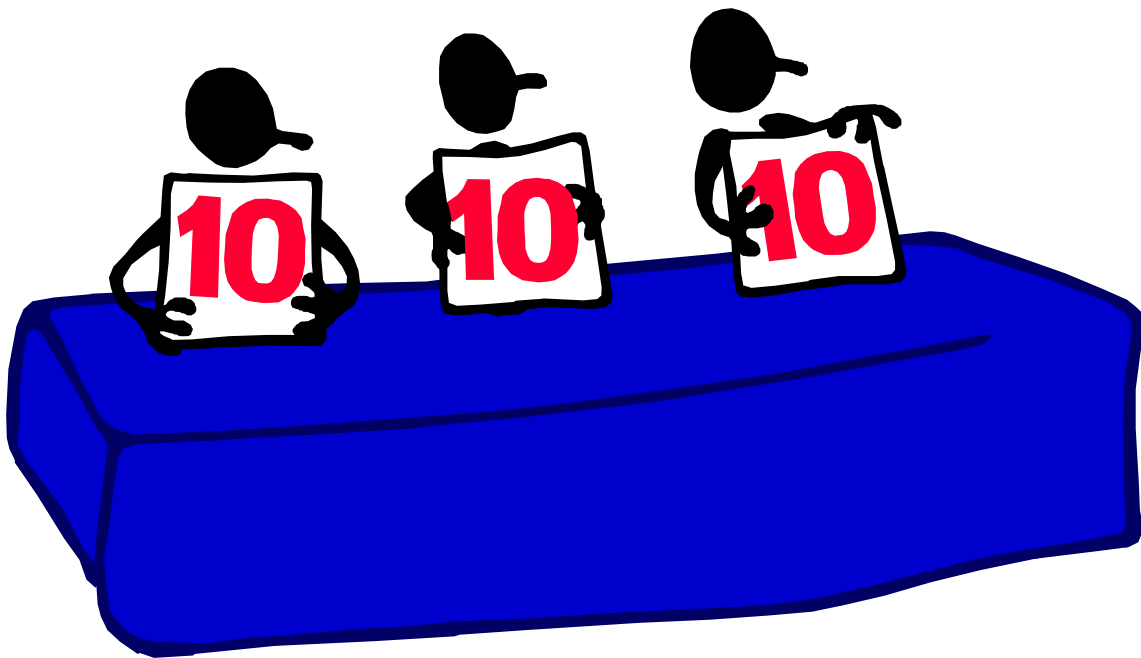
- Even if you really want the offer, do not say “yes” until you’ve had more time to think about it. Be gracious in your thanks for the offer and request a little time to make your decision.

Questions Commonly Asked by Employers/Graduate Schools

1. Why don't you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. What are your short and long range goals and objectives? How do you plan to achieve them?
3. Why did you choose to attend Ohio Wesleyan University? To major in _____?
4. What class has been the most rewarding and why?
5. How do you think a professor would describe your academic ability and work ethic?
6. How has your college experience prepared you for opportunities with our organization?
7. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction and why?
8. What changes would you make in your college or university?
9. What have you learned from your participation in _____ student organization, athletics?
10. How did you become interested in the career for which you are preparing?
11. To what extent are your goals compatible with the objectives of this position and the mission of this organization?
12. What interests you least about this position?
13. What thought process do you typically follow when asked to make a decision? Provide an example of a time when you used that process.
14. Describe what you learned from one mistake that you have made in a job.
15. What previous job did you enjoy the most? Why?
16. What is your greatest weakness?
17. How do you learn the best? What motivates you?
18. Tell me about a project you initiated.
19. What was the most useful criticism that you have received?
20. Define success.
21. Give me an example of a problem that you have solved and the process that you used.
22. Have you ever been faced with an unexpected issue or event? How did you react?
23. Describe a time when you were part of a team effort. As a team, what did you do and were you successful? What were some of the challenges you faced?
24. Give an example of when you were faced with a breakdown in communications and what you did to resolve it.
25. Describe a time when you expanded your skills beyond your "comfort zone." What was the outcome?
26. Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual. How did you deal with it?
27. Give me an example of a group in which you emerged as a leader. What is your style?
28. What idea have you developed and implemented that was creative or innovative?
29. What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
30. Give me an example of a situation in which you failed.
31. Tell me about 5 adjectives that describe you.
32. What do you think is the most difficult ethical dilemma facing our field today?

Questions Commonly Asked by Employers/Graduate Schools

- 33. What other companies/schools/positions are you considering?
- 34. Tell me what you know about what we do as an organization.
- 35. Why do you want to join this company/attend this graduate school?
- 36. There are candidates with stronger academic credentials—who should we consider you?
- 37. What features of our organization/program are the most attractive to you in your search?
- 38. What is your idea of how this industry (business, field, service) works?
- 39. Do you have a geographical preference?
- 40. Why do you think you are qualified for this position?What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
- 41. Why should I select you?



Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What motivated you to become a teacher?
2. How was your student teaching experience? How did that experience impact your expectations of the profession?
3. What is your role, as a teacher, in the learning process?
4. Describe one or two areas that you discovered while student teaching which you would like to improve.
5. How do you grade? Why?
6. What methods would you use to individualize instruction?
7. What are some ways you plan to maintain your enthusiasm about your class and elicit the same from your students?
8. How would you evaluate your students' reactions to you and your classroom?
9. How would you motivate a student who expresses little or no desire to learn?
10. Describe a student seating arrangement that would be in concert with your teaching style.
11. How do you plan on using technology in your classroom?
12. Would you become involved in extracurricular activities? Why?
13. Do you think it is important for students to like you?
14. What are some qualities/skills a "good" teacher might have?
15. Explain your experiences demonstrating your organizational skills.
16. What personal values do you think will be reflected in your teaching?
17. How do you feel about being observed by your building principal or other administrators?
18. What expectations do you have for your building principal and other administrators?
19. How would you help a struggling student succeed?
20. What is the most rewarding outcome for you as a teacher?
21. What is the most exciting thing that happened in your area of study?
22. What have you found to be the most difficult aspect of discipline?
23. If you could choose to teach any concept in your area, which would you select?
24. What is your greatest strength as a teacher?
25. In what area do you believe you need improvement?
26. How have you communicated student progress to parents?
27. What is the role of the student within your classroom?
28. Describe a lesson plan that you developed. What were the objectives, the format, and what type of evaluation did you use to see if your goals were met?
29. What should your students have gained from taking your courses?
30. What do you like most/least about being a teacher?
31. If you could, what would you change about the education profession?
32. What books/people/concepts/experiences have influenced you the most in your professional development?
33. Tell me about your favorite teacher.
34. How do you view discipline, motivation, planning, and classroom control in the learning process?
35. What is your position on competency-based instruction?
36. What interests you about this particular school system?
37. What is your philosophy of education?
38. What do you believe to be the most challenging issue facing educators today?



Top Interviewing Topics

Classroom Management
Student Teaching
Strengths
Weaknesses
Teaching Philosophy
"What If..."
Future Plans
Teaching Style
Motivational Theories
Academic Background
Learning Styles
Student Achievement
Parent Rapport

Questions to Ask Employers/Graduate Schools

1. I noticed from my research that a current accomplishment that _____ is proud of is _____. What do you see as the main advantages of _____ for someone at my level?
2. What major challenges is the company/graduate school program facing?
3. Where do people go when they leave the company or finish their graduate studies?
4. What are the challenges, positive and negative aspects of this position or graduate school program?
5. What do you enjoy the most about this company or graduate program?
6. What characteristics of this company/program do you think make it unique or attractive?
7. What are the growth plans for the future, both short and long range?
8. From your perspective, what are the common denominators in successful employees/students?
9. Are there areas where the company excels or has limitations?
10. Can you share with me areas of the company that need development?
11. Upon what criteria will my performance be evaluated?
12. What commitment does this company/graduate school have to the career development of its employees/students?
13. What outside influences could affect this company's growth?
14. What are the opportunities for progression and further involvement in the company/program?
15. How would you describe the work atmosphere/learning environment here?
16. What is the next step in the selection process?



Questions Teachers Might Ask of an Interviewer

1. What is the size of the average class?
2. How are extracurricular activities organized?
3. What kinds of textbooks, technology, etc. are used in the classroom?
4. How are teachers evaluated?
5. What changes is the school currently undergoing?
6. What is the relationship between the community and the school system?
7. What is the record of the community passing levies and bond issues?
8. What kind of support could I expect from fellow teachers, the principal and the superintendent?
9. What specific issues are of major concern to parents and/or the school board?

Illegal Questions...

What's the right ANSWER??

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. An employer's questions—on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process—must be related to the job to which you are applying. For the employer, the focus must be: "What do I need to know to decide whether or not this person can perform the functions of this job?"

OPTIONS FOR ANSWERING...

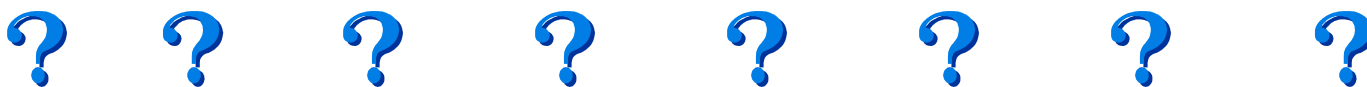
If you are asked an illegal question, you typically have three options.

1. You are free to answer the question—but if you choose to do so, realize that you are giving information that is not job related. And, you could harm your candidacy by giving the "wrong" answer.
2. You can refuse to answer the question. By selecting this option, you'll be within your rights, but you're also running the risk of coming off as uncooperative or confrontational—hardly the words an employer would use to describe the "ideal" candidate.
3. Your third option is to examine the *intent* behind the question and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For instance, the interviewer asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" You've been asked an illegal question. You could say, however, "I am authorized to work in the United States." Or if your interviewer asks, "Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel?" You might answer, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

Some examples of illegal questions—and their legal counterparts follow...



INQUIRY AREA	ILLEGAL QUESTIONS	LEGAL QUESTIONS
National Origin/Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you a U.S. citizen?• Where were you/your parents born?• What is your "native tongue"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you authorized to work in the United States?• What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently? (<i>This question is okay, as long as this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.</i>)
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How old are you?• When did you graduate from college/university?• What's your birth date?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you over the age of 18?



INQUIRY AREA	ILLEGAL QUESTIONS	LEGAL QUESTIONS
Marital/Family Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's your marital status? • Who do you live with? • Do you plan to have a family? When? • How many kids do you have? • What are your child care arrangements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? • Travel is an important part of this job. Would you be able and willing to travel as needed by the job? <i>(This question is okay, as long as ALL applicants for that job are asked it.)</i> • This job requires overtime occasionally. Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? <i>(Again, this question is okay as long as ALL applicants for the job are asked it.)</i>
Affiliations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What clubs or social organizations do you belong to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List any professional or trade or other organizations that you belong to that you consider reflect your ability to perform this job.
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How tall are you? • How much do you weigh? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job? <i>(Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.)</i>
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any disabilities? • Please complete the following medical history. • Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list and give dates. • What was the date of your last physical exam? • How is your family's health? • When did you lose your eyesight? How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to perform the functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodations? <i>(This question is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)</i> • As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. <i>(Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on the exam results.)</i> • Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related function?
Arrest Record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been arrested? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been convicted of _____? <i>(The crime named should reasonably relate to the performance of the job in question.)</i>
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? • What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

Evaluating Offers...

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IS THE POSITION A GOOD MATCH?

- Does it allow me to strengthen my marketable skills?
- Will my supervisor and I get along?
- Will this work hold my attention?
- Do the responsibilities use the best of my talents, skills and abilities?
- Is this something that “makes a difference”?
- Could this be a stepping stone to something better?
- Will it allow me adequate personal time?



IS THE ORGANIZATION A GOOD CHOICE?

- Does the culture fit my personality?
- Are the working conditions & geographic location acceptable to me?
- Does the organization offer room for growth?
- Are the company policies in writing?
- Is the industry growing or shrinking?



IS THE COMPENSATION ENOUGH?

- Am I being offered my fair market value in base pay?
- Will I have an adequate amount to live on (consider location)?
- How good are the benefits (health insurance, retirement plan, vacation, sick time, company car, etc.)?
- How valuable are any variable pay opportunities—bonuses, commissions, stock options?
- What is the basis for raises?

If you are unsure about your “fair market value”, ask to look at the *Salary Surveys* available in Career Services.



MAKING DECISIONS...

If you take the time to answer these questions when considering an offer, you will collect information you need to negotiate and make a decision. If you are still unsure about how to handle this part of the job search process, seek help at Career Services.

Research & Career Library Resources

The Career Services Library offers a number of resources for your review in preparing for interviews, including the following books:

- Interview for Success
- 201 Best Questions to Ask on your Interview
- Getting Interviews
- Knock 'Em Dead
- Vault Guide to the Case Interview

To further research employers, surf for information on the Internet. Look for their organizational website, as well as any current news regarding the organization in their local newspapers or in national newspapers, such as the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. Employer files are also available in the Career Services Library, which include literature and/or annual reports on a variety of organizations and companies. In addition, the following directories can also provide some information which is helpful when learning more about an organization:

- Hoover's Handbook of American Business
- Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries
- Hoover's Master List of Major International Companies
- Plunkett's Companion to the Almanac of American Employers: Mid-Size Firms
- Top 2500 Employers
- Hoover's Handbook of Emerging Companies
- Handbook of National Trade & Professional Associations

