



# PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

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# Preparing for the Interview

Often when we hear the phrase, “job interview,” we may think of a daunting, one-sided exchange. In a competition with several others, an employer interrogates the interviewee with questions, makes them feel intimidated, and brags about their company as the interviewee tries to “win” the job.

This scenario is not entirely accurate. Interviews do allow the employer to gather information about you, evaluate your fit in the organization, and promote their organization, yet they also serve as a way for you to evaluate your options. The interview process is your chance to learn more about an employment opportunity, decide if it is a fit for you, and showcase your acquired skills.

## **KNOW YOURSELF**

Before jumping in to practice interview questions, it is imperative to know your needs and wants from the position, as well as what you have to offer. What are you hoping to get from this job opportunity? Are you looking for experience in a particular field, a stable income, insurance benefits...all the above? What components of a position are non-negotiable (location, regular hours, opportunities for advancement, etc.)? What work will suit your interests, skills, values, and personality best?

Knowing yourself means being able to reflect on your education, experiences, accomplishments, strengths, and weaknesses. While this may seem like an easy task, communicating clearly and providing specific examples can be challenging on the spot. Having a clear understanding of the skills you developed, the contributions you made, and the value you brought to each work/volunteer/extracurricular experience will allow you to provide quality responses in an interview.

## **RESEARCH THE COMPANY/POSITION**

Once you have a solid understanding of what you want and what you can offer, it's time to research the company. Here are some suggestions for finding information:

- Company website - go beyond the homepage
- LinkedIn - research who is at the organization (do you have any contacts there?), you may also want to look up who is interviewing you (do know that people can see who has viewed their profile, adjust your LinkedIn settings if this is a concern).
- Google News - see if any there is any current media coverage of the organization (bankruptcies, expansions, mergers, lawsuits, etc.)
- Social media channels - get current information on new products or services
- Executive Summary - this is a yearly report sometimes available online that details the financial position of the company, as well as their successes and challenges over the year
- Glassdoor.com - learn from company reviews, CEO approval ratings salary reports, and interview reviews
- Career Assistance Network - connect with a Wesleyan Alum (available in the Career Center)

Here are some questions to help guide your research:

- What are the major products or services produced by this company/organization?
- How does the company stand out among competitors?
- How well is the organization doing financially?
- How large is the organization in terms of services offered, annual sales, and employees?
- What are its plans for the future? Expansion? New products? Services? Marketing and promotion?
- How is the organization viewed by its clients, employees, suppliers, and competition?
- How is the organization structured? Where does the position for which you are applying fit in?
- Does the organization have regional or branch locations that could offer you geographical preference?

Research the position for which you are applying. Analyze the job description for the position to understand exactly what the organization is seeking in a candidate.

- When reading the job responsibilities, in which areas are you most experienced? What examples could you give?
- Are there any listed responsibilities that you are not prepared for? How might you explain this so not to raise concern?
- What power-verbs (e.g. lead, sell, organize, coordinate, design, etc.) does the job description use? How might you use their language in your interview?
- What desired characteristics are they seeking? How could you demonstrate these characteristics in examples?
- Why is this role of interest to you? Why are you the right fit?

Finally, find out as much as you can about the interviewing situation. Be mindful that the recruiter setting up the interview may or may not disclose this information. In this case, you may find it helpful to ask someone you know within the organization.

- Who normally conducts the interview? What is their position?
- What is the company dress code and what attire is expected for the interview? Business formal (suit) is fairly standard, but certain companies are becoming more relaxed, requesting that their interviewees do the same.
- How many interviews are required before the organization makes a final hiring decision?
- How many individuals or groups will be present during the interview?
- What type(s) of interview(s) does this organization conduct? One-on-one? Series? Panel? Group?
- Where will the interview(s) take place?
- Will the interview include any personality assessments or skill tests?

## PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK

The last step before rehearsing your responses to questions is to actually develop questions for your interviewer. As you have researched, it is likely that you have developed questions. Job interviews often close with an opportunity for you to ask questions, and it is advantageous for you to have prepared questions. Asking well-prepared questions allows you to get the information you need to determine if the job and employer are a good match for you. Additionally, your thoughtful questions demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in the organization. Listen carefully during the interview since they may provide an overview of the position and answer the questions you have prepared.

We suggest avoiding questions that may come across as self-centered or those related to salary or benefits. These types of questions may reflect a feeling of "What do I get?" instead of the desired "What can I offer?"

Design your questions to demonstrate your research of the organization and position. Be sure to not ask questions which could easily be answered from looking online or within the job description. The following are a few appropriate questions for an interviewee to ask:

- What are the principle responsibilities of this department?
- What kind of person are you looking for?
- What is the best experience and background for this position?
- What is the most important responsibility? The least?
- Where are the last three people who held the job working now?
- What is your biggest challenge?
- What role would you like me to have in solving it?
- What does a typical day look like in this role?
- What is my potential supervisor's background?
- Whom would I report to? Can you tell me a little about these people?
- Who are the other people I will work with?
- What are going to be my most important relationships-- clients, customers, other employees?
- What learning opportunities are there?
- What problems might I expect to encounter on this job?
- What has been done recently in regards to \_\_\_\_\_?

# Anticipating the Scenario

The ability to talk comfortably about yourself, what you have done, and how you would fit into a certain position only improves with practice. After practicing on your own, set up a mock interview for specific feedback on the content and quality of your answers, as well as your nonverbal behavior.

## BODY LANGUAGE

First impressions are often lasting impressions. Within the first few minutes of an interview, maybe even before you say anything, your body language will speak volumes about your confidence, professionalism, and enthusiasm for the role. Here are a few things to consider:

- Do you smile when you meet someone and provide a firm handshake?
- Do you make just enough eye contact without staring at the recruiter?
- Do you walk into the office with a self-assured and confident stride?
- Is your padfolio, coat, and water in your left hand, or do you have to juggle them around to shake hands?
- Do your eyes travel naturally to and from the recruiter's face as you begin to talk?
- Do you remember the recruiter's name and pronounce it with confidence?
- Do you make small talk easily, or do you act formal and reserved, as though under attack?

Realize that it is natural to be nervous. Most interviewers will not dock you because of it, but you also want to avoid it interfering with your ability to conduct yourself professionally. To overcome jitters, mentally rehearse your interview. Imagine the interviewer asking questions, and envision yourself providing clear and solid answers. This type of preparation will, at minimum, help you feel more optimistic and self-confident.

## PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Your self-assessment and research will be very useful as you practice possible interview questions. Your interviewer is interested in your decision making, analysis and problem solving, initiative, interpersonal qualities, teamwork, communication, and leadership. While it's impossible to anticipate all the questions an interviewer will ask, a useful strategy is to consider why the interviewer is asking the question. What information are they seeking in relation to your ability, desire, and fit in this position?

As you consider possible interview questions, formulate responses which include specific examples of course work, extracurricular activities, or relevant work experiences. For example, if asked why you would like to work in human resources, rather than saying, "because I like to work with people," discuss your human resources courses and specific experiences throughout your HR internship. Also, try to quantify what you have done when possible. Numbers reveal the extent of your experience and accomplishments. Give concrete examples that demonstrate how you can meet the needs of the organization and position. Aligning your qualifications with a company's needs will help you stand out.

Consider what the interviewer needs to know about you during the interview. Come up with five specific reasons why you would be an excellent fit and make these themes throughout your interview. Planning ahead will ensure that you provide relevant and specific information that the employer needs for them to have confidence hiring you. Here are some questions to read through and practice:

### Traditional

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Walk me through your resume.
3. What short-term and long-term goals have you set for yourself?
4. What two things are most important to you in a position?
5. What two accomplishments are you most proud of?
6. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
7. What has been your greatest challenge?
8. What is the most important lesson you've learned in or outside of school?
9. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
10. How do you determine or evaluate success?
11. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
12. Why are you the best person for this position? Why should I hire you?
13. What challenges are you looking for in a position?
14. If you were hiring someone for this position, what qualities would you look for?
15. What is most important to you in this job?

### Academic

1. Do you feel your GPA reflects your academic ability?
2. How has your major prepared you for this position?
3. How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?
4. What course have you enjoyed least/most? Why?
5. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
6. Do you have plans for continued study?
7. Why did you select Nebraska Wesleyan?
8. Why did you choose this career path?
9. What college subjects did you like best? Least? Why?
10. How would you plan your academic study differently?
11. Describe the ideal job for you following graduation.

### Company/Work Culture

1. What are your expectations for your future employer?
2. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
3. Describe the relationship that should exist between supervisor and subordinates.
4. Why are you interested in this organization?
5. What can you contribute to this company?
6. What do you know about our company?
7. Are you willing to travel?
8. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
9. Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?

### Experience

1. How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
2. What are your team-player qualities? Give examples.
3. Describe your leadership style?
4. What is your approach to handling conflict?
5. How do you motivate others?

6. Describe a leadership role you held and why you committed time to it.
7. What work experience has been most valuable to you?
8. What was the most useful criticism you received?
9. How did you decide which extracurricular activities to join? What did you gain from these experiences?
10. What contributions have you made to a group?
11. What types of situations put you under pressure? How do you deal with pressure?
12. What frustrates you in the workplace?

### Situational

1. How would you handle an irate client who, in a very public venue, was expressing their dissatisfaction regarding your organization?
2. What steps would you take to resolve a computer problem.
3. A co-worker tells you in confidence that she plans to call in sick while actually taking a week's vacation. What would you do and why?

### Behavioral

1. Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a problem.
2. Describe a situation where you facilitated teamwork among individuals who were initially hesitant to work together.
3. Give an example of a system that you have used to handle a multi-faceted project.
4. Describe a situation when you had a conflict with another person and how you handled it.
5. Tell me about a time you set a goal and failed to reach it.
6. Give an example of a situation when you made a mistake and how you handled it.

### ANSWERING BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Behavioral questions are based on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past behavior. When responding to behavioral interview questions, keep the acronym P.A.R. in mind. This will assist you in keeping your responses specific and to the point. Realize that employer don't just want to know about the problem, emphasize your actions and results to show what you learned and how you grew from the experience.

<b>P</b>	Problem: What was the situation or specific problem that had to be addressed?
<b>A</b>	Action: What specific skills/tools did you use to address the task?
<b>R</b>	Result: What was the result of your intervention or involvement? Results don't always have to be positive! Sometimes our approach does not yield the results that we wanted, but we learn from the experience.

## HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you, the job candidate. An employer's questions – whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process--must be related to the job you're seeking. For the employer, the focus must be: "What do I need to know to decide whether this person can perform the function of this job?" If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- Answer the question--you're free to do so if you wish. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you're giving information that isn't related to the job; in fact, you might be giving the "wrong" answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
- Refuse to answer the question, which is within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational--hardly words an employer would use to describe the "ideal" candidate.
- Imagine the question for its intent, and respond with an answer that addresses their concern. For example, if the interviewer asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" You've been asked an illegal question. With this question, we can assume they are concerned about your work status. One way to answer would be to say, "I am authorized to work in the United States." Similarly, if the interviewer asks, "Who's going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?" You might answer "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

The chart on the following page displays examples of some illegal questions and their legal counterparts.

## ILLEGAL QUESTIONS



## Interview Mistakes to Avoid

- 1. Being unprepared**
  - No knowledge of what the company does, company history, values, mission, industry
  - Unsure of the job responsibilities
- 2. Lack of Interest/Enthusiasm**
  - No questions asked
  - Unable to communicate why they are interested in the job/company
- 3. Inappropriate Attire**
  - Too casual (most are looking for applicants to wear a professional, conservative business suit)
  - Too much perfume/cologne/makeup
- 4. Poor Body Language**
  - No eye contact or stares uncomfortably, makes unfavorable facial expressions
  - Leaning on chair/desk/table
  - Fidgeting
  - Weak handshake
- 5. Lack of Resume Knowledge**
  - Cannot articulate accomplishments/provide specific examples
  - Overstated/incorrect work history
- 6. Lack of Punctuality**
  - Being late without reason
  - Arriving too early (be waiting 10-15 minutes before the scheduled time)
- 7. Unprofessional**
  - Talking negatively about past company/manager/employees
  - Chewing gum
  - Using inappropriate language
- 8. Rambling Answers**
  - Talking so much that the question is left unanswered (no more than 2-3 minutes)
  - Bragging/displaying arrogance rather than confidence
- 9. Cell phones or other devices**
  - Turn them off to avoid any possibility of distraction
- 10. Poor Listening**
  - Missing the point of the question
  - Cutting off the interviewer
  - Not taking notes

<b>Inquiry Area</b>	<b>Illegal Questions</b>	<b>Legal Questions</b>
<b>Nationality</b>	Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue"?	Are you authorized to work in the United States? What language do you read/speak/write fluently? <i>(acceptable only if relevant to the performance of the job)</i>
<b>Age</b>	How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
<b>Marital/Family Status</b>	What's your marital status?  With whom do you live?  Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child-care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?  Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? <i>(okay if it is asked of all applicants for the job)</i>  Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? <i>(okay assuming it is asked of all applicants for the job)</i>
<b>Affiliations</b>	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?	List any professional groups or organizations you belong to which are relevant to your ability to perform this job.
<b>Personal</b>	How tall are you? How much do you weigh? <i>(Acceptable ONLY if the minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job.)</i>	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
<b>Disabilities</b>	Do you have any disabilities?  Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health? When did you lose your eyesight? How? Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? <i>(Can be asked only after a job offer has been made.)</i>	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? <i>(okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job)</i>  Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?  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 treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results.)</i>
<b>Arrest Record</b>	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of _____? <i>(crime named should be related to the performance of the job in question)</i>
<b>Military</b>	Were you honorable discharged from the military?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?  What training or education did you receive in the military?

# Interview Styles and Types

## SCREENING INTERVIEW

The screening interview is a first glimpse used by a prospective employer to determine if an applicant has the basic qualifications to warrant an in-depth interview. The interview is short in duration, usually a half hour or less. Screening interviews may be conducted over the phone or through video. On-campus interviews are often screening interviews as well. These interviews may be very structured or conversational.

## PHONE INTERVIEW

A phone interview is just as important as an in-person interview and requires just as much research and preparation. Before starting a phone interview, free your area of any distractions. Gather a copy of your resume, cover letter, and information regarding the position and the company. Consider using a landline phone number, unless you can guarantee perfect cell phone reception. If you are using your cell phone, you might use speakerphone (as long as there is no background noise), and you should turn on your phone's "do not disturb" setting so as not to be distracted by other phone calls or texts. Just as you would with any other interview, prepare a list of questions regarding the position and the company. Do not chew gum and remove any earrings, as either can cause unnecessary noise and distraction for both you and the interviewer.

- Do not interrupt the interviewer. Without body language cues, this is more challenging over the phone.
- Smile. You can hear a smile as well as you can see one. The interviewer will be able to sense your mood and emotion throughout the call. Remember to keep a positive attitude as the phone interview is conducted.
- Have a glass of water within reach. The liquid will help your voice stay neutral and professional.
- Remember that silence is okay! Silence is a natural part of any conversation. During a phone interview, moments of silence might seem especially long. Give yourself the time you need to think about your response to the interviewer's questions.
- Dress professionally for your phone interview. While the interviewer can not see you, "dressing the part" can help you get into a professional mindset and focus.
- Remember to ask about the next steps in the hiring process.

## VIDEO INTERVIEW (Recorded Responses; Live Virtual Interview)

Video interviews are becoming more popular and are being incorporated in several new formats. Some video interviews may include questions popping up on the screen with recorded responses sent to the interviewer, while others may be conducted in real time via an online platform such as Zoom or Skype. Ensure that you know the software the employer is using, download what you need ahead of time, and make sure you have the most up-to-date version. Be sure to check your speakers and microphone for clarity, and make sure you have a strong internet connection. Here are a few additional tips:

- Make sure your device is fully charged before the interview.
- Minimize any background movement (avoid sitting in front of a window where people or cars are in the background). Your background should be void of any distracting décor; sit in front of a blank wall if possible.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit room. Consider placing a lamp or a ring light in front of you.
- Turn your camera on and dress head-to-toe for the interview as though it were in person (wear business casual at minimum, but you may need business professional attire depending on the organization).
- Ensure you are approximately eye-level with the camera. Avoid touching or scratching your face, head, or neck. Hands should never go above shoulder height.
- In a live virtual interview, be sure to have your microphone muted when the interviewers are speaking. Consider muting your microphone as a default setting when joining meetings.
- In a live virtual interview, be sure that your screen name includes both your first and last name. You may consider adding your personal pronouns after your name if you are comfortable doing so.
- Write down the names of the interviewers and use those names when appropriate so it's clear to whom you are directing a question or comment.
- Look directly into the video camera. If possible, try to position the interviewer's image directly below your camera so your eyes aren't glancing elsewhere.
- Notify the interviewer immediately if you are experiencing any technical problems, such as difficulty hearing the question or an excessive delay in the sound or picture.



## **HIRING (IN DEPTH) INTERVIEW**

The hiring interview, often viewed as the “real interview,” is more in-depth and generally conducted by higher level positions within the department. Questions are typically more specific and job-content related. If, however, the interview is conducted by the human resources department, questions will be more general in nature. Hiring interviews can be conducted by one person or could be conducted by several. Different formats abound. You may have one interview, or several in a series. Treat each successive interview as your first; equal preparation, enthusiasm, and attentiveness should be presented at each meeting.

## **PANEL INTERVIEW**

In a panel interview, three to five persons (perhaps six to eight for some positions) ask questions of one applicant. If the interview is highly structured, each panel member will be assigned a certain area of questioning to ensure a well-rounded and complete interview. Although often viewed as a “pressure cooker” interview, panel interviews allow you the opportunity to respond to a variety of individuals rather than just one, as well as have your questions answered by more than one person. Maintain eye contact with all members and try to include all in your questioning. If you do want to ask a question to a specific individual, clarify who you are addressing in your question. In a business environment, a typical panel might include a representative of the human resources department, a hiring manager, a supervisor, and members of the immediate work group.

## **GROUP INTERVIEW**

A group interview not only includes a panel of interviewers, but includes multiple applicants as well. The group interview format may be chosen as a means to observe applicants’ group processing and interpersonal skills, or the format may be used simply to save time. In such an interview, you must be very alert, perceptive, and creative. You must demonstrate sound communication and problem-solving skills and be attentive and responsive to other group members, both interviewers and interviewees. A group interview requires excellent listening skills to avoid repetition and attention to others’ non-verbals to demonstrate sensitivity.

## **STRESS INTERVIEW**

Stress interviews are designed to see how you operate under pressure and are generally used only if the position itself involves a great deal of stress. Stress tactics include:

- long periods of silence
- challenging your opinions/choices
- contradictory responses from panel members
- unfriendly interviewers
- firing of numerous, repeated questions with no time for reflection
- layered questions (i.e. the same question asked multiple times to get beyond your ‘canned’ response)

In a stress interview, remain calm and be complete, concise, and to the point in your answers. Acknowledge that you are in a stress interview and try not to lose your composure.

## **SOCIAL INTERVIEW**

You may have an interview scheduled with a meal. Such interviews will more likely be a second or third interview or a follow-up interview to introduce you to your co-workers. It may happen by chance (for example, if you have an 11:00 a.m. interview which runs over, and your interviewer suggests you finish up over lunch). In a social interview, remember you are there for the interview, not for the meal. Here are a few tips:

- Show appropriate table manners and good posture.
- Order in the same price range as the interviewer.
- Stay away from messy foods such as fried chicken, spaghetti, ribs, or boney fish.
- Be conscious of how you are treating your server.
- Start and stop eating with the interviewer.

## **TESTS OR SELF-ASSESSMENT**

More frequently, employers use assessments to identify skills and/or strengths of potential employees. The type of assessments you will encounter will depend upon the type of position you are seeking. For example, insurance or other business areas often administer short mathematical or word problem exams. However, most companies focus on psychological assessments designed to highlight additional personality characteristics which would allow for a more precise matching of company necessities and candidate qualifications. Our advice for these is to be authentic. Don’t assume you know what they’re looking for, and try to keep “N/A” or neutral answers to a minimum.

# Interviewing Over a Meal

Now more than ever before, job interviews, client meetings, and company receptions are held over a meal. Knowing how to represent yourself and your organization professionally will help you avoid embarrassing gaffs as you seek to make a solid impression.

Here are some helpful tips in a **formal dining situation**:

**Prepare topics of conversation.** Consider who you might be sitting with and prepare by having topics of conversation ready. Browse the news to be informed and gain some ideas. Always keep the conversation light. Good topics include family/children/pets, vacation/weekend plans, TV/sports/movies/books, the economy and how it affects their industry, and corporate culture at their place of work. Avoid talking about politics, religion, and other potentially controversial topics.

**Apply table manners.** Always enter your chair from the right and exit from the same side. Sit up straight. Do not place any bags, sunglasses, cell phones, or other items (even your elbows) on the table. Ensure your phone is on silent and do not check it in the company of others. Do not begin eating until all have been served and the host begins. You will not go wrong by watching your host and doing what he/she does.

**Use your napkin.** Gently unfold your napkin and place it on your lap as soon as you are seated. Do not return the napkin to the table until the end of the meal. Place your napkin on the arm or seat of the chair if you need to leave during the meal.

**Order wisely.** Choose an entrée from the mid-price range. If you're unsure what to order, ask the host for their recommendation. Avoid messy or unfamiliar foods that may drip or splatter. Your behavior should not draw attention to your eating. If partaking in alcoholic beverages, have no more than one.

**Know protocol when passing.** Some meals will be served "family style", meaning that dishes of food are brought out and you pass the dishes around the table. The person closest to an item initiates passing, offering it to the person on his/her left first. Then items are passed to the right. Pass items with your left hand and receive with your right hand across your body. Always pass the salt and pepper together, and pass items with handles with the handle toward the recipient.

**Utensils.** Utensils are arranged by use. You will use the outermost utensils first. Do not cut all of your food at once; rather, cut a few bites at a time. Lay the knife across the top of the plate with the sharp edge toward you when not in use. When finished, place your fork and knife together across your plate. Placing the tines up when finished is consistent with the American style of eating; however, you may notice that some will put the tines down. This is consistent with the Continental style. See Figure 1 for an example of a formal place setting.

**Know who pays.** If you were invited to the formal dinner, the host always pays the bill. Don't try to be showy by offering to pay for the group or even offering to pay your share.

## Here's what NOT to do:

- Brush your hair, apply makeup, or be on your phone at the table.
- Blow your nose at the table.
- Wipe off your silverware before eating.
- Reach in front of another person.
- Help yourself from a dish first.
- Lean over the plate as you eat.
- Hold food that is ready to be eaten on your fork or spoon. Instead, eat it promptly.
- Blow on food to cool it.
- Crunch crackers in your soup.
- Leave your spoon in the coffee, tea, or soup cup. Instead, place the spoon on the saucer to the right.
- Stack your dishes.
- Drink liquids from a bowl.



Figure 1. Formal Place Setting.

### Other Useful Tips:

- Dry foods not served with utensils are finger foods (celery, carrot sticks, olives, crackers, small sandwiches, etc.)
  - Soup is taken with the soup spoon, dipped away from you and sipped off the spoon. Crackers are eaten with your fingers.
  - Bread is buttered with a knife, one bite at a time.
  - Use your knife to cut your salad into smaller pieces, if necessary.
  - Foreign matter (fish bone, fruit seed, inedible material) is to be removed with utensils and placed on the side of the plate as inconspicuously as possible.
  - Large-stemmed glasses are held at the base of the bowl (think red wine served at room temperature). Small stemmed glasses are held by the stems (think white wine or champagne which is served cold).
  - Ordinary coughing is done behind the hand, without excuse. For a coughing fit, leave the table.
  - Blowing your nose is done quietly and without excuse.
  - Small quantities of spilled foods on the table may be picked up immediately, without comment, and returned to the plate. For larger spills, ask for help from wait staff.
  - If given a finger bowl, dip the tips of the fingers of one hand at a time and dry them on the napkin in your lap. You may touch your moistened fingers to your lips, but do not moisten the napkin for this purpose.
  - A coffee cup is held with the handle between your thumb and fingers. Do not hook a finger through.
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Other than a formal meal, you may find yourself in a **networking reception or cocktail party setting**. In this situation, guests are expected to casually mingle over hors d'oeuvres and drinks. The ability to connect in brief conversations can make or break careers. Follow these tips for successful small talk:

**Introduce yourself by name.** Even if you think they know who you are, always say your name. Stand up, smile, use good eye contact, and shake hands firmly. Never immediately interrupt the flow of the conversation. Either wait to be recognized within the conversation or wait for a meaningful pause in order to introduce yourself.

**Listen.** People, even those who are reserved, like to talk about themselves and will do so if you know how to draw them out. You will never learn anything if you do all the talking. Listening shows interest in their opinions and ideas, so give your full and real attention.

**Ask questions.** Ask open-ended follow-up questions based on the other person's responses. Questions that begin with what, why or how will allow the other person to provide a detailed response (i.e. "Why did you choose to visit Minneapolis?"). Try to avoid several close-ended questions which result in a yes or no response and can dead-end the conversation.

**Consume in moderation.** The purpose of a reception is to talk to others and make connections. Do not fill your plate. You can always come back for more, but only take small amounts. Also, remember to take small bites and do not talk with food in your mouth.

**Keep your right hand free.** Hold your beverage cup on the top of your plate in your left hand. This will keep your right hand free to greet others.

**Be sure to circulate.** To meet others, you'll need to know how to exit a conversation. When the time comes, graciously excuse yourself from the conversation. Thank the person for their time and ask for a business card. If you are concerned about leaving someone stranded, introduce a new conversation partner before you leave.

# Dressing for the Interview

Because it takes only seconds to make a lasting first impression, it is imperative to look professional. Employers seek to hire those that look the part. They need people who will serve as a positive representation of their company; especially to the public, customers, and clients.

Styles of clothing vary from one field to another, as well as by geographic location. The majority of work environments are business casual to business professional. In these instances, a suit is expected. If you are unsure, ask someone you may know at the organization. Otherwise, ask the individual who is setting up the interview.

Dress for the position, but always remember it is better to be overdressed than underdressed. Grooming is something most take for granted, but clean hands and fingernails and washed hair are essential.

## THE BASICS of BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE

- A two-piece, dark colored, matching suit is always the preferred interview attire, even if daily attire for the position is more casual. Black, navy, and dark gray are appropriate suit colors. A good fit is the key to a great suit.
- Everything worn to an interview should be clean and ironed. Don't forget about sales tags, threads, or stains. Be sure to remove any tacking stitches holding vents in suits.
- Clean hair, ears, teeth, and nails are essential. Hair should be pulled back away from the face.
- Avoid using too much perfume and cologne. Less is more.
- Shoes should be polished and in good condition. Ensure that you can walk in them comfortably.

### Women – Business Professional

- Pants vs. Skirts. Both options are generally appropriate. If in doubt, observe the attire of other females in the industry or business.
- Skirts should be long enough to cover thighs when seated. The most professional look is a skirt that ends at the knee.
- Avoid extremes in style and color when choosing shirts, jewelry, and fingernails.
- Use makeup conservatively. A little is usually better than none for a polished look.
- Shoes should be closed-toed. Pumps are a general standard, but ensure walkability.
- Hosiery should be without patterns, sheer, and in a complimentary neutral color.
- Avoid bringing in large bags. A padfolio, and/or small, simple purse are typical.



### Men – Business Professional

- Tie styles change frequently, so select something simple, professional, and of good quality.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, even in warm weather. White or light ivory in solid or conservative stripes are most common.
- Wear dark socks long enough to reach the mid-calf so that no skin is exposed when sitting.
- Shoes should be leather and good quality. These are an investment, so plan to use them for years to come.
- Belt should be leather and match the shoes.
- Facial hair must be well-groomed.
- Accessorizing with a conservative watch is also acceptable, even recommended.

# Day of the Interview

## **ARRIVAL**

You are finally ready for the interview! Be sure you know exactly when, where, and with whom this experience will take place.

Do NOT be late for your interview. In anticipation of your arrival, be sure to allow time for something unexpected to pop up; changing clothes due to spills, road construction, or traffic accidents. Make sure to leave plenty of time to find a parking space and make one last stop to check your hair and appearance.

Ideally, you want to be ready and in the waiting area for your interview 10 minutes in advance of the scheduled time. However, allow yourself 15 to 20 minutes if you need to fill out application forms.

Unforeseen circumstances do come up. If you will be late, take a deep breath, call to warn them, and apologize for any inconvenience you may have caused.

## **FIRST IMPRESSION**

As soon as you enter the door to the company, know you are being evaluated. While you may be anxious, attempt to appear relaxed and happy to be there. Taking the extra step to smile at people in the hallway or strike up a conversation with the front desk worker may be what lands you a job. If you are asked to wait, we recommend staying off of your phone because this might come across as being disengaged and distracted. It is important to appear prepared, so be sure to have your documents and anything else you brought with you in order. On some occasions, you may be given a water or coffee; be sure to keep your drink in your left hand in preparation for a handshake.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

Consider bringing a leather-bound padfolio with a legal pad and pen for note-taking. This is a good place to list questions you would like to ask. On the folder side of the padfolio, include copies of your resume printed on resume paper (the Career Center can provide this paper for you). Realize that some interviewers will expect you to have hard copies and may end the interview abruptly if you do not. Additionally, ensure that you bring a list of your references (also on matching resume paper). If you have not provided your references yet, be sure to do so at the conclusion of the interview.

If appropriate, some interviewers will require a portfolio of your work. Be prepared by bringing this along if it is necessary. Knowing you will be talking extensively during the interview, be prepared by bringing in a bottle of water. Aside from these items, avoid bringing in too much stuff. If you choose to bring in any devices (watch, phone, tablet), be sure to turn them on mute. Also, keep your car keys quietly secured. Cumbersome large bags, backpacks, or over-stuffed pockets can cause you to appear clumsy or unorganized.

As an additional tip, considering bringing a thank you card for each interviewer with an envelope and stamp. Immediately following the interview, jot a note of appreciation and get the cards in the mail quickly (more on this in "After the Interview".)

## **HANDSHAKE**

The handshake is an important non-verbal piece of the interview because it is one of the first interactions you'll have with your interviewer. Here are some things to remember:

- Point your thumb towards the ceiling
- Shake from your elbow, not your wrist
- Keep a firm grip (neither abrasive nor flimsy)

## **INTERVIEW “DOS” AND “DON'TS”**

The following pages include a list of job interview “dos” and “don'ts.” Remember that no single “do” will get you the job, but any one of the “don'ts” could eliminate you from the hiring pool.

### **DO...**

- ...ensure that your hands are clean with trimmed nails and your hair is tied back, out of your face.
- ...visit the restroom before waiting in the lobby.
- ...get a good night's sleep before your interview. This will help you be alert and sharp with your responses.
- ...look the interviewer in the eye. Recruiters place a lot of emphasis on eye contact.
- ...offer a firm (not bone-crushing or limp fish) handshake
- ...smile.
- ...get the interviewer's name correct and use it sparingly throughout the interview.
- ...bring some money with you just in case the interviewer tells you he/she would like you to grab lunch or coffee.
- ... take notes if you wish, but ask permission first.
- ... let the interviewer set the pace.
- ...listen carefully to understand the questions and give yourself time to compose an answer which is concise, but thoughtful. Don't go off on tangents.
- ...avoid general statements such as “I want to utilize my education and ability,” or “I like to work with people.”
- ...answer questions in terms of your skills and accomplishments.
- ...give specific examples of how you used your skills.
- ...use action verbs to describe specific experiences.
- ...project enthusiasm, flexibility, ease of communication, and a willingness to take on the job.
- ...pay attention to your nonverbal communication.
- ...focus on the employer's needs and how your skills contribute.

### **DON'T...**

- ...have gum or candy in your mouth.
- ...put your elbows on the interviewer's desk. Sit tall with good posture.
- ...pick up anything from the recruiter's desk unless you are invited to do so.
- ...give one- and two-word answers. The recruiter is trying to get to know you. Talk to them.
- ...mumble, ramble or interrupt the interviewer.
- ...use slang or profanity.
- ...say filler words such as, “you know,” “um”, “like”. Instead, pause.
- ...overuse the interviewer's name. It is good to use it a few times, but too much is annoying.
- ...slip into a speech-making or preaching tone of voice. Responses should sound conversational.
- ...chatter while the interviewer is reviewing your resume. Let him/her read it in peace.
- ... interpret items on your resume until you are asked. If additional details are needed, the interviewer will ask for them.
- ... overpower the recruiter with bragging or overstatements.
- ...lie about anything.
- ...criticize your present employer.
- ...look at the clock or your phone during the interview.
- ...ask if you will get the job.
- ...talk about salary until later in the hiring process or until the recruiter brings it up.
- ...give yes or no answers. Expand with brief examples.
- ...speak negatively about former employers or co-workers.

## **CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**

At the conclusion of the interview, your interviewer will likely ask you if you have questions. At this point, make sure that you ask questions that reflect your knowledge and interest in the prospective position, company, or industry. (Refer to page 2) We also recommend taking some time to provide a brief summary of why you'd be right for the job and reaffirm your interest in the job.

If you would like a timeline, it is completely appropriate to ask your interviewer about next steps and a date-range of any decisions. One of the very last but most important things you should do is thank the employer/interviewer for the interview and shake their hand.

# After the Interview

## THANK YOU NOTE

To demonstrate your interest and qualifications for the position, a thank you note is a must. While some may think this is an optional step, it is arguably one of the most important. Be sure to send a thank you note no later than 48 hours after you interview.

Here are some tips for writing thank you notes:

- Use the correct spelling, proper title, and address for the individual(s) you are writing to
- Send a separate thank you note to each individual you interviewed with
- Write something that will spark the person's memory of your conversation
- Reiterate your interest in the position
- Draw attention to the match between your qualifications and the job requirements

We highly recommend sending a hand-written thank you note because it demonstrates sincerity. However, if you have been communicating with the employer via email prior to the interview, it is acceptable to e-mail your thank you note.

Here's an example:

Dear Mr. Corbin Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the marketing internship at PayPal. I especially enjoyed learning about the extensive research PayPal has done to create a customized and engaging customer experience.

Based on our conversation, I am confident that I could bring my project management skills and new and fresh ideas from my marketing strategies class to enhance the efforts at PayPal.

I am thankful for the chance to discuss the marketing internship with you, and I look forward to hearing back soon.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Jones



Thank you

## HOW DID IT GO?

You survived, but don't throw the towel in yet! Take time to reflect on your interview. What went well? What might you need to improve upon? Evaluate what you learned about the position, company, or industry. Is this a position you could see yourself in? If you're offered the job, will you take it?

The Career Center at NWU wishes you the very best in your job search. If you have questions related to interviewing, the job search, or if you would like to practice your interviewing skills, contact us to schedule an appointment.