

BASIC SKILL

Interview Skills

RATIONALE

In a way, this is the culmination of many basic skills learned throughout the semester. For example, shaking hands, making eye contact and opening doors for others goes a long way to create a good first impression. Reflective listening skills and note taking skills can build rapport during the interview. It is important to have a resume prepared before the interview and equally important to write a thank you note afterwards.

EXERCISE

Set up mock interviews for the students. Have them dress up, bring their resumes and interview for a job. It is best to videotape these interviews to allow playback and critique. When I taught this course, the director of the city parks actually interviewed students for a real job. Afterward, he told the class who he would like to hire and explained his rationale. Several of these students worked for him during the summer.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Do as much research as you can on the company prior to the interview. Prepare intelligent questions you can ask during the interview to show you've done your homework.
- Practice your responses to common interview questions. Learning to sell yourself is a new skill.
- Always bring a pad of paper, extra copies of your resume, a planner and a pen to the interview, preferably in a professional portfolio (this is an excellent graduation gift).

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Remember it's the little things that make a big difference.

- Arrive early and be extremely polite to the receptionist – he/she can sometimes make recommendations, especially when two applicants are equal.
- Do not wear perfume or excessive jewelry. Tattoos should be covered up and visible piercings should be removed. Don't give an employer a reason to not hire you.
- Dress professionally – it is always better to be overdressed than under-dressed.
- Make a good first impression by using a firm handshake, introducing yourself and making eye contact. Remember, most employers make a decision about a candidate in the first five minutes of an interview.
- Employers are looking for someone who is motivated and has a positive attitude – be sure to exemplify this with your verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Be confident and poised. A big turnoff is a candidate who is either too timid or too arrogant.
- Maintain eye contact throughout the interview. Use reflective-listening skills. Key into what employers are looking for and try to frame your answers to meet their needs.
- Every candidate has strengths and weaknesses. Be honest about your weaknesses, but try to frame them in a positive manner. Overcoming objections is a key to getting hired.
- At the end of the interview, be prepared to provide a summary statement. Say something like, "In summary, I feel that I am the best candidate for the job because..."

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Within 48 hours, write a thank you letter and mail it to the person who interviewed you. Be sure to emphasize your desire for the job and summarize your strengths.
- Sometimes it takes a long time for companies to get back to you. Don't become a pest by calling too soon or too often.

Sample Interview Questions to be Used During the Mock Interview

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What are your three greatest strengths?
- What are your three worst weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What kind of student were you in school?

LIFE QUESTIONS

- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- What kind of personal goals have you set for yourself?
- Who has had the greatest influence on you? Why?
- What celebrity do you most admire and why?

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- What was the last movie you saw and how did it affect you?
- What types of books and magazines do you read?
- What are your hobbies?
- How do you handle people that you really don't get along with?
- What have you done that shows initiative?

WORK RELATED QUESTIONS

- Can you work well under stress?
- Why did you decide to apply for this job in this company?
- Describe your perfect job.
- How important do you think character and integrity are to succeeding at this job?
- What kind of recommendations would I get from previous employers or teachers?
- Can you supervise people? What is your leadership philosophy?
- What kinds of grades did you get in school? Were you capable of doing better?

CURVE-BALL QUESTIONS

- If you were a car, what kind of car would you be and why?
- If you were an animal, which animal would you like to be? Why?
- Sell me the pen that I am holding.
- If you won the lottery and became a millionaire today, what would you be doing a year from now?
- If you could go back in time to any era, what era would you pick and why?
- What is your most vivid memory as a child?