



# Interviewing Guidelines

## Tell Me About Yourself

The interview is a two-way exchange of information designed to determine if there is a match between you and the employer. While the employer is evaluating you, you are evaluating him/her to determine compatibility with your skills, values and interests.

Employers begin to evaluate you from the first moment they see you; within the first 30 seconds an employer makes a judgment about you. It is very difficult to change this initial opinion. It is critical that you know how to project a positive image within the first few minutes with direct eye contact, a smile, a friendly greeting and a firm handshake.

Remember, the most stressful thing about an interview is not being prepared and believing you have to have "all the right answers." First, there are no right answers; only your honest and sincere responses. Second, there are ways to prepare to eliminate most of the stress of an interview. The best interviews are when **preparation** and **practice** occur prior to the interview.

### PREPARATION- KNOW YOURSELF:

#### Skills/Interests:

Identify strengths, key abilities, interests and personality characteristics that demonstrate the best you have to offer. Identify specific events that demonstrate these strengths, abilities and characteristics.

#### Education and Experience:

Analyze your accomplishments, abilities, activities, academic work and internships.

#### Goals:

Articulate your short-and long-terms goals and how they complement the organization.

#### Values:

What do you need in a career? What do you hope to achieve through your career? What is important to you? A few sample values include:

- Help others
- Influence over people
- Compensation
- Competition
- Security
- Variety

### KNOW THE FIELD/EMPLOYER

#### Knowledge of profession or field

- Know the professional concepts, jargon and trends
- Know the skills, expertise and experience necessary to succeed
- Be able to discuss your background, various skills and experiences as they relate to the position and the employer
- Highlight your transferable skills

#### Know the employer (research the employer)

- Mission and philosophy
- Products and services
- Their past, present and future
- Needs
- Their reputation
- Competition

## Where to research

- Conduct informational interviews
- Utilize the Volunteer Career Network on DU Careers Online
- Study employer web site and promotional literature if available
- Go to [www.du.edu/career/careerlinks.html](http://www.du.edu/career/careerlinks.html) to Research Employers and Industries
- Read newspapers/journals/trade magazines
- Research and consider joining a professional association
- Contact the local Chamber of Commerce

## PRACTICE:

Rehearse common interview questions on your own or with a trusted friend. You may also schedule a mock interview appointment with the Career Center to practice your interviewing skills. Dress professionally and bring your resume to the appointment.

## THE INTERVIEW:

Arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview. If possible, visit the location the day before to be sure you know where you are going. Be prepared. Act confident. Dress for success. Be yourself. Try to relax.

- **What to Bring**

Bring extra copies of your resume and a list of your references. Be prepared with a written list of questions for the interviewer and samples of your work, if appropriate.

- **What to Wear**

*For Women:* A suit or pantsuit in muted tones. Avoid low cut blouses or frilly materials. Hosiery should always be considered, but nothing with a pattern.

*For Men:* Dark suits, matching socks, a coordinated collared shirt and conservative tie

*For Both:* Conservative is usually the best guideline. It is better to over dress than under dress. Polished shoes and ironed blouses and shirts are the little details that get noticed. Avoid perfume or cologne. Hair should be neat, clean and not draw attention.

- **Format**

*Warm Up:* The interview begins with a greeting and handshake along with an explanation of the structure of the interview.

*Data Gathering:* The bulk of the interview is filled with open-ended questions, behavior-based interview questions, follow up questions and a determination for fit and chemistry.

*Interviewee Questions:* This is your chance to ask questions and gather your own data.

*Closing:* Next steps and wrap up of any additional questions and details.

- **Interview Questions**

- Behavior-Based Interviewing (BBI) is a common type of interview. Past behaviors are good predictors of future behaviors. The questions are open-ended, focus on past events and encourage the interviewee to talk at length about a particular past event. A typical opening for a BBI is "Tell me about a time when..." Therefore, specific details communicate the best you have to offer.
- In order to answer BBI questions thoroughly, utilize the **STAR Strategy**. Set the scene by giving an example of a Situation or Task (**S/T**) you experienced. Proceed by explaining the actions or steps you took (**A**) in the process. Complete your answer by discussing the outcome or results (**R**) of your actions. Practice using this technique to keep your answers specific and concise. As a general guideline, prepare several stories to adapt to BBI questions.

- Sample response: “Give an example of a time when your demonstrated initiative.”  
*“In the summer before my senior year, I was an intern at the American Cancer Society. One of my projects was to assist with fundraising and corporate sponsorships for an upcoming charity event (S/T). It became apparent that we were still about \$25,000 from our goal. I took the initiative to go through past materials and locate former corporate and private sponsors who had not donated in the past 2-4 years (A). For a week, I called these contacts and researched new contacts and disconnected phone numbers (A). After putting in numerous hours, my efforts raised another \$9,000 towards our goal (R). During the charity event, the Executive Director presented me with an Employee Excellence award to recognize my efforts and initiative (R).”*

**\*A list of BBI questions is at the end of the handout\***

#### **Questions for the Interviewer:**

You will have the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions. Take this time to demonstrate your interest and research. Formulate at least three questions ahead of time. It is acceptable to have these questions written down and refer to them when the opportunity arises. You may take brief notes, which are a good resource to refer to when you write your thank you note.

**\*A list of questions to ask the interviewer is at the end of the handout\***

#### **POST INTERVIEW:**

- Collect business card(s) from anyone who interviewed you.
- Determine what you did well and what you would like to improve.
- Critique the interviewer and organization to determine if this is a good match for you.
- Prepare for a second interview. Do more research if necessary. Prepare to answer questions you struggled with or did not know the answer to in the first interview.

#### **FOLLOW-UP:**

- Send a thank you note to the person who interviewed you. If several interviewers were in the same session, you may decide to send a note to the hiring manager or generate letters to each individual.
- The thank you note is generally short. The main purpose is to thank the interviewers, reaffirm your interest in that position and the employer and highlight points from the interview that further interested and energized you. This is an opportunity to reiterate why you want the position and why you are qualified. Use your notes to recall key points he/she said during the interview.
- When time permits, it is best to mail or hand deliver a typed or handwritten thank you note. If this is not possible, you may send an email.
- Be prompt in sending the thank you note.
- Follow up the interview with a telephone call if you have not heard from them within the stated time mentioned in the interview.

#### **RESOURCES:**

- Call the Career Center at 303-871-2150 to schedule a mock interview appointment.
- Go to the Career Center web site at [www.du.edu/career](http://www.du.edu/career) and click on Career Links. Scroll down to “Links by Subject” and look for “Interviewing” for links on the Internet.
- Utilize the Career Center Library for numerous resources on successful interviewing.

## BEHAVIOR BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about a time when you were able to solve a problem that others could not.
3. Tell me about a time when you managed conflict successfully.
4. Describe a situation in which you were effectively able to tell your boss about a problem or some bad news.
5. What have you done that caused you to stand out amongst your peers?
6. What have you done that saved time, increased efficiency, or improved a process?
7. Tell me about your most (or least) challenging thing you have done.
8. Tell me about a time when you had to overcome major obstacles to meet a challenge.
9. Tell me about a time when you tried to change a situation.  
- What strategy did you use? How did the situation turn out?
10. Tell me about a time when you tried to do something and failed.
11. Tell me about a mistake you made in dealing with people or working on a team.
12. Tell me about the best and worst class you have ever taken.
13. Give an example of a time when you were disappointed or pleased with your ability to lead.
14. Tell me about a time when you were successful in coping with a pressure situation.
15. Tell me a situation where you had to persuade someone to accept your idea or proposal.
16. Describe your most creative work or school-related project.
17. What are a (job title's) most important skills and why?
18. Demonstrate to me that you possess three of those skills.
19. Describe a situation where you demonstrated initiative.
20. Tell me about a time when you could have worked harder than you did.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

1. What are some of the major short and long-range company objectives?
  - Demonstrates that you are interested in what is important to the interviewer.
  - Helps you to formulate your comments to fit their objectives and to see if you fit in.
2. What characteristics of this company are attractive or unique?
  - The answer you receive will give you reasons for or against working for this organization.
3. What outside influences could effect this company's growth?
  - How vulnerable is this firm? What market changes would make them skyrocket or fail?
4. Are there areas where the company excels or has limitations?
  - The answer will give you the information you need to focus your comments—the areas where your skills and abilities will help with the organization's growth.
5. From your perspective, what are the common factors in successful employees?
  - This is a different way to ask what the employer is looking for in an ideal candidate.
6. Can you share with me the areas of the company that need polishing or developing?
  - Every employer is looking for ways to save money or time. With the information you receive, you should be able to explain how your skills will them time and money.
7. What would you add or subtract from the person who held this position previously?
  - If you are following in the footsteps of someone wonderful, wouldn't it be nice to know before starting? You will be judged based upon past saints and sinners. This information helps you to make the job your own.
8. What concerns do you have about my abilities or me?
  - This is the secret weapon question. This question will help you find out if there is something that concerns them. You can address them before they have a chance to make a decision based upon that information.
9. Where do you think I could contribute the most effectively?
  - This is actually an assumptive way to convince the employer to hire you.
10. "May I have the job?"
  - It is harder for some people to ask for what they want than it is for others. If you want something enough, you need to ask for it. Or try, "I am very interested in this position and am anxious to move forward."
11. When you do get to that fourth interview with the senior vice-president, continue to ask questions.
  - It is ok to ask the same questions—you get everyone's perspective.
12. Why is this position open? Is it a new position or did the previous employee leave?
13. Tell me what you like about working in this organization?

*Sample Questions for the Employer adapted from Colleen Kay Watson, Career Professionals*