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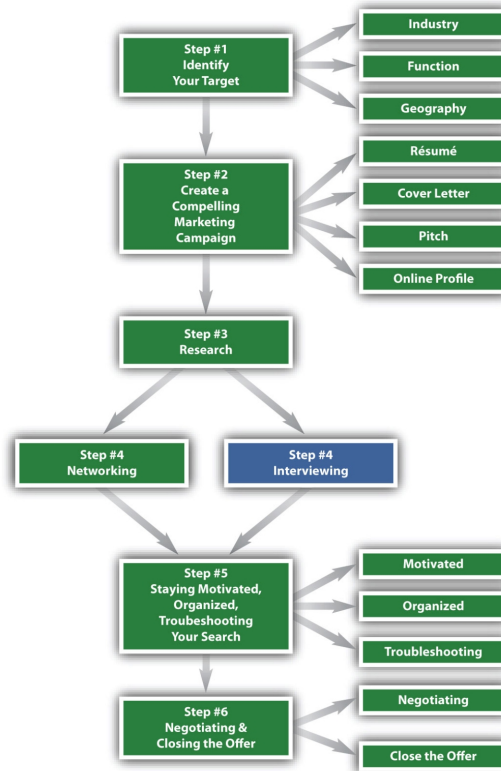
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# Chapter 8

## Step 4 (Continued): Master the Interview

Figure 8.1 The Six-Step Job Search Process—Step 4 Continued



## Overview

### You Can Become an Exceptional Interviewee

You have now completed three full steps of your job search and half of the fourth step. You have accomplished four things:

1. Identified your target
2. Created a compelling marketing campaign
3. Conducted in-depth research
4. Networked

The second half of step 4 focuses on the interview process. Networking and interviewing are paired for two reasons:

1. A networking interaction is also a mini-interview that can easily turn into a legitimate interview; an interview is also a networking opportunity.
2. The more effectively you network, the more effectively you will interview. Interviews lead to job offers and acceptances, so it's vital that you network with people who have the influence to either arrange interviews or introduce you to people who can arrange interviews.

Each interaction with a company representative is a mini-interview. Future employers are constantly evaluating your behavior at every stage of the job search. For example, when they call you to discuss the potential of having a face-to-face interview, they note how you answer the phone and how you follow up. When you e-mail them information regarding your candidacy, they evaluate your writing ability and communication skills. While an interview is a formal meeting to evaluate your candidacy, the real interview begins much earlier.

An interview can be defined as a conversation between two or more people in which the interviewer asks questions to obtain information from the interviewee. A better definition might be an exchange of information between the interviewer and interviewee to assess if a match exists between a job's requirements and a person's skills and abilities.

The second definition is much more proactive in the case of the interviewee. As an interviewee, you should not passively answer questions, but should employ strategies so you are presented in the best possible light. As an interviewee, you also are responsible for highlighting your strengths in the interview and giving answers that are detailed and results oriented. This chapter will give you such strategies.

Key strategies for a successful interview will be explored in depth in this chapter, but as an overview, you should have three goals:

1. Know yourself.
2. Know your résumé well enough to enthusiastically speak about every minute detail.
3. Know the company, the position, and the industry for which you are interviewing.

**Know Yourself.** Know your strengths well enough to match them to relevant job descriptions. If you have strong analytical skills, then analyst or accounting positions may be of interest. If you have strong client-service skills, perhaps a career in retail would be a great match. Knowing yourself allows you to target positions accurately, which then results in successful interviews and suitable positions.

**Know Your Résumé.** You should be intimately aware of every detail on your résumé, including all past projects and the quantifiable results of those projects. If you are **stumped**<sup>1</sup> on a question about your résumé, then it's almost guaranteed that you will not get a second-round interview.

**Know the Company, the Position, and the Industry.** The third job search strategy focuses on research. You should know extensive amounts of information about the industry, the company, and the position before the interview and be knowledgeable enough to speak fluently about the company, its goals, and its ranking among its competition.

**Structure of a General Interview.** An ordinary thirty-minute interview could have the following structure:

- Two to three minutes: greetings, small talk, interviewer sets the stage
- Twenty minutes: interviewer asks five to six questions
- Five minutes: interviewee has the opportunity to ask two to three questions

1. Not knowing what to say when asked about a particular item or action.

- Two to three minutes: discussion of next steps, closure of interview conversation

Although the preceding structure is the most common, you shouldn't expect this at all times. Interviews can veer from this typical structure for several reasons:

- The interviewer could try to throw you off your game and ask you only one question for the entire interview. That question could be "Tell me about yourself." If that happens, you should be prepared to take control of the interview and run with it.
- The interviewer could think you are too well rehearsed, and ask **hypothetical questions**<sup>2</sup> that are difficult or impossible to practice before an interview.
- The interviewer could start by telling you to ask any questions you might have. In a typical interview, candidates ask questions at the end, but sometimes the interviewer has the candidate ask questions first. If that happens, you should have walked into the interview with five to seven well-researched questions about the company, the position, and perhaps the interviewer.

**Your Interview Strategy—Prepare and Practice.** Multiple strategies will be reviewed to increase the chances of success during and after an interview, but the main strategy focuses on *preparation*. Prepare ahead of time and control what you can, so if something happens to throw you off your game, you will be much better prepared to deal with it.

The more prepared you are, the better you will perform. It's a universal truth that works for any skill or sport. If you play softball, you will be a better softball player if you practice as much as possible. It's the same with interview skills: the more you practice, the better your skills will be. Many other strategies can help you prepare, including knowing the types of interviews, interviewers, the types of questions you will be asked, and the types of questions you can ask. Being prepared will strengthen your interview skills, which, in turn, will strengthen your chance of receiving a job offer.

**The Interviewer.** The interviewer has a very important job: they need to find the very best talent. Interviewers build their reputations on the quality of the individuals they hire. The stakes are high for you as well as the interviewer.

2. Imaginary to a large degree. These are based on something that is completely uncertain.

Preparation on your part is critical as well. You probably hope every interviewer you meet is skilled, but that may not always be the case. If your interviewer is not

an expert in the interview process, you should be prepared to highlight your strengths no matter what questions are asked. Again, preparation is vitally important. This chapter will give you the best strategies to prepare for meeting any interviewer, regardless of their skill level.

## 8.1 What to Do Before, During, and After an Interview

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn success strategies to employ before, during, and after an interview.
2. Understand that creating routines can improve your chances of success.
3. Learn effective follow-up skills that are critical to the interview process.

An interview is framed by what happens before, during and after.



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### Before

What happens *before* an interview will help you succeed. This includes taking the following steps:

- **Assess**<sup>3</sup> your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes, and your goals
- Prepare and practice: know where you are going and get your interview suit ready in advance
- Have a routine that you will follow the day of the interview

### Assess

Before you even walk into the interview room, you need to **assess** a few things:

- Your strengths and weaknesses
- Your likes and dislikes
- Your goals

### Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses

It's vital that you know your strengths and weaknesses because you should compare them to the job description. Is there a match between what they are looking for and your skills and abilities? If some of a job's most important skills and abilities appear in your weakness column, there is no match. If your top three or four strengths appear in the job description, there is an obvious match.

### Know Your Likes and Dislikes

A huge difference exists between spending your entire workday interacting with people versus sitting in front of a computer screen analyzing data all day. Creating a spreadsheet (or a **dashboard**<sup>4</sup>) that highlights sales figures and presenting that to your boss weekly is vastly different from standing in front of a group of twenty to thirty peers and managers and presenting that data.

You must know your likes and dislikes because a workday can be long, and you should at least like most of what you will be doing. Some people are motivated by the amount of money they will make in a job, however, and if that works for them, it's sufficient. It's also important, however, to like the type of work you will be doing. It makes for a miserable day, week, month, and year if you do not.

3. To estimate the value of something.

4. A concise, one-page document that includes several points of interest.

College internships are key because they expose you to work you might like, as well as work you definitely would not like. Having as many internships as possible is a goal every college student should have. It may be helpful to know that the vast majority of companies hire mostly juniors because they will graduate in one year and some companies would like to extend full-time offers to their summer class. But don't let that dissuade you from seeking an internship if you are a freshman or



sophomore. It may be more difficult to obtain an internship, but it's definitely worth the effort if it gets you closer to what you do or do not want to do on a full-time basis.

### **Know Your Goals**

While in college, it's beneficial if your internships help you understand exactly what you want to do, and exactly what you need to do to get there. For example, if you are interested in marketing, you might have a sophomore internship at an advertising firm. You might end up doing mostly administrative work, but you get some exposure to the creative team. One of the team members allows you into a couple of meetings (with your manager's permission), and you experience what their job is like. This is it for you! This is what you want to do.

Your next logical step is to discuss with your manager if the next summer is a possibility, especially if you could work with the creative team. You hope your manager is so impressed with your work, your attention to detail, and your passion that you receive the open slot next summer in the creative department. If you aren't guaranteed a job the following summer, make it your goal to target more advertising agencies and garner a job in a creative group. The more directed you are, the more likely it is you will get the job you want.

### **Prepare**

Preparation is key to succeeding in the interview process. The following steps will help you get a second round of interviews:

- Research the industry, the company, the competitors, and the interviewer (if possible).
- Practice answering interview questions.
- Have a full dress rehearsal three days before the interview.
- Know where you are going in advance, and get there thirty to forty-five minutes early.
- Have a routine the day of the interview.

### **Know the Industry, the Company, the Competitors, and the Interviewer**

Completing the research step ensures that you have fully researched the company, the industry, and the competition. Knowing how to interview well within the industry and company will help you get a second interview. You also might be able to research the interviewer using Google or <http://www.linkedin.com>. Having

relevant background information might give you helpful hints on how to position yourself.

### **Practice Answering Interview Questions**

The section of this chapter titled “Different Types of Questions” has a detailed list of the top questions asked during an interview and strategies to succeed with each question. Pay close attention to that section to help you prepare for an actual interview. For now, before you practice actual questions, you can do four things:

1. Check with your career services department. Do they have an interview guide? Do they hold interview workshops? Will they conduct a mock interview with you? If so, take advantage of what is offered.
2. Google additional interview questions and look in the mirror as you practice answering these questions. Get an interview buddy to ask you these questions, as well as probing questions, to dig deeper into your answers.
3. Be confident when answering (even if you don’t feel confident), be positive, and don’t undersell yourself.
4. Focus on the results of each of your projects, tasks, and courses. A results-oriented candidate has a better chance getting the second interview and potentially the offer.

### **Have a Full Dress Rehearsal Three Days before the Interview**

Being prepared reduces stress and improves performance. Here is a checklist of things to do and consider before your interview day.

- Make sure your interview suit is clean and fits perfectly. You should feel very comfortable in the clothes you wear for an interview. This helps build your confidence.
- Pay attention to colors and style. If you are interviewing at a company where the dress is casual, it is still best to dress in a professional, conservative manner. Men and women should consider conservative suit colors such as navy, beige, and black. White or beige shirts give a very professional appearance. If you are not sure, it might help to shop at a professional clothing store.
- Shine your shoes and be certain they are in excellent shape. Women should wear closed-toe shoes with moderate-height heels.
- Take care in all aspects of your appearance, including your hair and nails.
- Bring extra copies of your résumé.

- Write down well-researched questions before the day of the interview.
- Carry a professional-looking briefcase that has an inside portfolio containing paper and a pen.
- Keep a small bottle of water in your briefcase in case your mouth gets dry.
- Carry a cloth handkerchief in case your face perspires (for any reason). Some people sweat more than others and using a handkerchief is more professional (and sanitary) than using your hand. Avoid tissues because they can leave a residue that doesn't make a very good impression. On a somewhat related note, if you happen to sneeze during an interview, sneeze into your sleeve versus into your hands. The interviewer will not want to shake your hand otherwise!

### **Know Where You Are Going**

Getting lost on the way to an interview will only increase your stress, so know exactly where you are going, even if you must make a trial trip. Few things are worse than being late or arriving looking like you just did the one hundred-meter dash.

### **Routine**

#### **Establish a Routine to Follow the Day of the Interview**

The most successful interviewees have a routine that includes the following:

1. Set two alarm clocks to make sure you wake up early enough to have plenty of time to get ready for the day.
2. Have your interview suit ready to go, your shoes polished, a portfolio with two to three copies of your résumé and a working pen, and five to seven questions already written down.
3. Arrive at least thirty minutes in advance to avoid the slightest possibility of being late. You may wait in your car or a coffee shop until fifteen minutes before the interview. You don't want to let the interviewer know you are there thirty to forty-five minutes early.
4. Read or listen to something inspirational before your interview.
5. Carry a small bottle of water in your briefcase in case your mouth gets dry.

### **During**

The moment you have been waiting for has arrived—the actual interview. Keep six things in mind:

1. Body language
2. Networking updates
3. Focus
4. **Authenticity**<sup>5</sup>
5. Questions to ask toward the end of the interview
6. Questions about the next step

### Body Language

It is important to be aware of nonverbal impressions such as your handshake, eye contact and eye movement, posture, and facial and hand expressions. A sizeable percentage of what we communicate comes via **body language**<sup>6</sup>:

- Eye contact
- Smile
- Handshake
- Posture

### Eye Contact

Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview. It's OK to look away occasionally, but, for the most part, eye contact should be steady. It shows confidence and inspires trust in all that you say.

### Smile

When you are feeling stressed, a smile usually relaxes your face, which usually helps you to relax overall. An introductory or occasional smile shows that you are enjoying the conversation, and it adds to your confidence factor.

### Handshake

Practice your handshake. The Goldilocks approach is best: Don't crush the interviewer's hand, but don't give a soft, floppy handshake, either. Your handshake should be firm and businesslike. If you get nervous to the point of having a sweaty palm, wipe it against your pants leg or skirt just before you shake your interviewer's hand.

### Posture

Sit up straight with your shoulders back and your feet firmly planted on the ground. It's fine to cross your legs if you feel more comfortable doing so, but avoid

5. Being real and genuine, not fake.

6. Nonverbal impressions such as handshake, eye contact and eye movement, posture, and facial and hand expressions. It is generally accepted that a sizeable percentage of what we communicate comes via body language.

looking too relaxed. You should be poised and fully focused on the interviewer, ensuring that you answer all questions to the best of your ability.

### Networking

If you've met others in the company, mention that up front. It's a great way to open an interview because you establish that you've already met others at the company, and the interviewer also can contact them for feedback.

### Focus

The more focused you are during an interview, the more successful you will be. Focus on the question asked and answer it directly. If you think you've gone off course for any reason, it's OK to ask the interviewer if you are on the right track. Your answer should have a beginning, a middle, and an end that includes a real, **tangible**<sup>7</sup>, and preferably positive result. Here is an example of a question asked and an effective answer:

*Question:* Jenna, what was your biggest contribution to the company you interned with last summer?

*Answer:* Throughout the summer, we had approximately five to six team meetings where the entire staff of ten engineers and their direct reports were present to discuss the major goal of the summer: the construction of a new courthouse.

I was tasked with drafting the agenda of these meetings and the agenda notes, which verified all that was discussed and agreed upon. The agendas directed complex meetings, and the agenda notes served as key documents that verified and clarified what was discussed and agreed upon during the meetings.

My first draft of the first agenda was much too broad, but with feedback from my manager, I ensured it included all the details necessary to hold a productive and effective meeting and created the structure for the agenda notes document. The agenda notes were typically three to five pages long, and by the second meeting, I was drafting the agenda and publishing the notes without any revisions from my manager.

I received exceptional feedback from several department heads because, in many instances, the notes saved countless hours of work. For example, during the third meeting, we reversed course on a previously agreed-upon strategy for the front columns of the courthouse. One of the key assistant engineers was not at the

7. Something real and measurable.

meeting, and when her peer brought her up to speed, he forgot to mention that the columns were changed from the Roman style columns to the Grecian columns, which needed a more intricate support system from the roof to the courthouse steps. Luckily, she read my agenda notes, which highlighted any course changes in red, and saved about two weeks' worth of work, which was easily several thousand dollars. It also kept everyone on track regarding the completion date, which is June 2014.

To improve this process overall, I loaded the agenda and the notes into the department's central files so instead of relying upon hard copies or e-mailed copies, everyone had one place to go for this important document that kept everyone on track. They are still using the improvements I implemented, so I'm very proud of that.

The answer's beginning set the stage:

- Throughout the summer, we had approximately five to six team meetings, where the entire staff of ten engineers and their direct reports were present to discuss the major goal of the summer: the construction of a new courthouse.
- I was tasked with drafting the agenda of these meetings and the agenda notes, which verified all that was discussed and agreed upon.

Notice it had a middle that allowed you to understand how things were working:

- My first draft of the first agenda was much too broad, but with feedback from my manager, I edited it to include all the details necessary to hold a productive and effective meeting and create the structure for the agenda notes document.
- By the second meeting, I was drafting the agenda and publishing the notes without any revisions from my manager.

Positive momentum was built throughout the answer, and Jenna shared the positive results of her work:

- I received exceptional feedback from several department heads because in many instances, the notes saved countless hours of work.
- To improve this process overall, I loaded the agenda and the notes into the department's central files, so instead of relying upon hard copies or e-mailed copies, everyone had one place to go for this important document that kept everyone on track.

- They are still using the improvements I implemented, so I'm very proud of that.

### Authenticity and Honesty

Never misrepresent anything about yourself during the interview:

- Don't indicate you are fluent in a language if you aren't.
- Don't mention you know a computer program that you clearly don't know.
- Don't mention you've been to a certain city if you haven't been there.

Interviewers have a way of discovering any misrepresentations, so save yourself misery and humiliation by being authentic and honest.

### Questions to Ask toward the End of the Interview

This important step in the interview process is relatively easy and can be done in advance of the actual interview. Use the research you've already conducted to formulate five to seven questions you'd like to ask at the end of the interview. [Table 8.1 "Topics and Potential Questions"](#) includes some topics and potential questions.

Table 8.1 Topics and Potential Questions

Topic	Question
Goals of the company, division, department	I understand that your main goal is to complete X.
	Are you pleased with your progress so far?
Goals for the position	I understand that should everything work out and I receive the offer, I would be responsible for Y.
	Would you expect that I will be able to do that in one month, three months, or six months?
Training program	Is there any training I would receive prior to my first day?
	Would I receive ongoing training, or is it basically on-the-job training?
Critical skills needed	What two or three skills do you think are absolutely necessary to succeed in this role?
Culture of the company	I've researched your website and learned that the culture is x, y, and z.

Topic	Question
	Would you agree? Can you add anything to this?
Questions about the interviewer	How did you get your start in this business?
	What are you most proud of in your time at this company?
	What is the one thing about this company that you are most focused on improving?
	To what do you attribute your success at this company?
Additional questions	I read the speech the chairman gave at the X conference last month. In that speech, she mentioned the importance of leadership and that this company is building a strong bench strength of leaders. How is that being done?
	I recently read a few articles about this company in <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> and on <i>BusinessWeek's</i> website. The articles seemed to say X. Do you agree?
	I see that the stock has held steady lately. Can you tell me what you think caused this increase (or decrease)?

Remember to do two things when preparing your questions for the interview:

1. Match the proper questions to the proper interviewer:
  - If you are interviewing with a managing director, ask about the goals of the company, the division, or the department. Ask about the stock of the company and ask what keeps them up at night.
  - If you are interviewing with someone in human resources, ask about what is covered during the training program. You can also ask what skills are necessary for success, about past alums from your school, and so forth.
  
2. Research everything you can before the interview:
  - Research the company's, the division's, and the department's goals. Study the website, speak to alumni (if possible), and attend marketing events prior to the interview.
  - Research your interviewer using Google and LinkedIn.
  - Gather information from your network. Are your interviewers alumni from your school? If you knew someone else at the company, before the interview takes place, it's fine to mention who you know and where you met.



### **Question Your Next Steps**

Your final interview question should pertain to the next steps you should take so you will know how to follow up. Be certain your last question accomplishes the following:

- It demonstrates that you are forward thinking and that you tie up loose ends.
- It clarifies the follow-up process.

### **After**

You can take definite steps after an interview to improve your chances of being called back for a second round or getting an offer for the position. Four steps increase your odds:

1. Send a thank-you note.
2. Update all parties relevant to your search.
3. Create your follow-up strategy.
4. Set up additional targets.

### **E-mail a Thank-You Note before the Day Ends**

E-mail, versus a handwritten note, is preferred for many reasons:

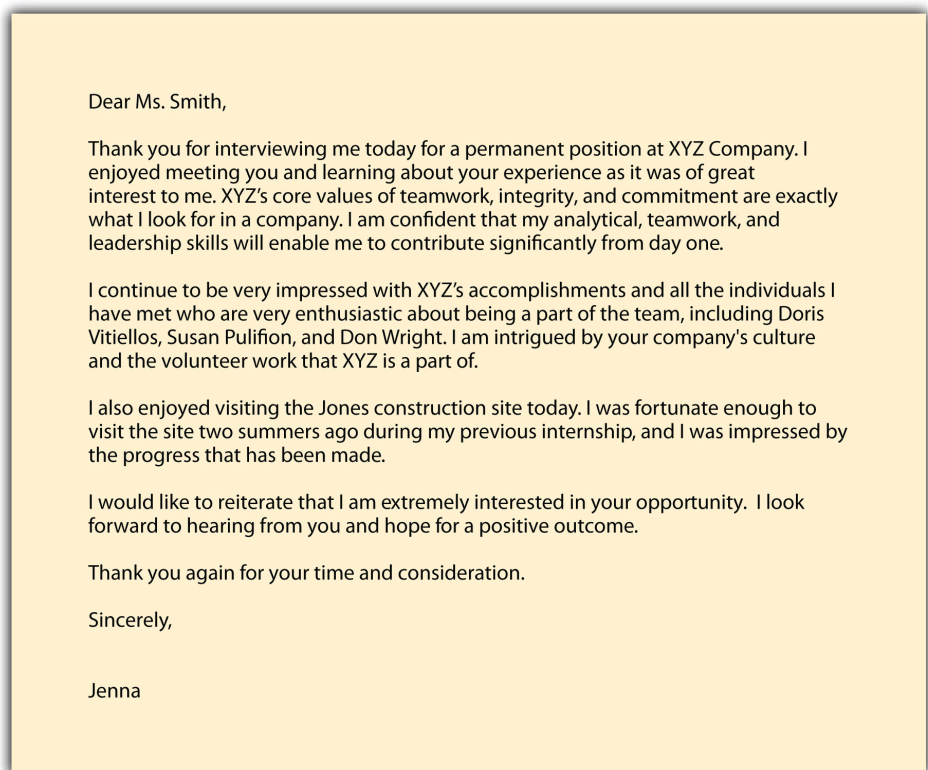
- Your note will be immediately received by the interviewer. It's common courtesy to thank people for their time right away, and manners count quite a bit during the job search.
- Your ability to write a concise business note is demonstrated.
- Your quick communication keeps you at the top of the interviewer's mind.
- Your e-mailed thank-you note can be shared easily and often by everyone who interviewed you. This positive momentum keeps you in a positive light with all parties.
- Your e-mail is an opportunity to quickly confirm that you have the critical skills necessary to do a fantastic job. In the e-mail, you can reiterate the skills you have or mention something specific that was discussed in the interview, thus making an even stronger case for why you'd be a great hire.
- Your e-mail can include an attached article about the company or about an interest you share with the interviewer.

- Your e-mailed thank-you note is more likely to receive a response from the interviewer.

Some individuals believe a handwritten note distinguishes you from others; while that may be true, you never know if it arrived. You could send an e-mail and a handwritten note to cover all the bases, but don't use the exact wording for both notes. Using a high-quality, professional notepaper or stationery is recommended.

Figure 8.2 "Sample Thank-You Note 1" is a sample thank-you note an employer received after a first-round interview.

Figure 8.2 *Sample Thank-You Note 1*



Dear Ms. Smith,

Thank you for interviewing me today for a permanent position at XYZ Company. I enjoyed meeting you and learning about your experience as it was of great interest to me. XYZ's core values of teamwork, integrity, and commitment are exactly what I look for in a company. I am confident that my analytical, teamwork, and leadership skills will enable me to contribute significantly from day one.

I continue to be very impressed with XYZ's accomplishments and all the individuals I have met who are very enthusiastic about being a part of the team, including Doris Vitiellos, Susan Pulifion, and Don Wright. I am intrigued by your company's culture and the volunteer work that XYZ is a part of.

I also enjoyed visiting the Jones construction site today. I was fortunate enough to visit the site two summers ago during my previous internship, and I was impressed by the progress that has been made.

I would like to reiterate that I am extremely interested in your opportunity. I look forward to hearing from you and hope for a positive outcome.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenna

Figure 8.3 "Sample Thank-You Note 2" and Figure 8.4 "Sample Thank-You Note 3" are additional examples of a thank-you note.

Figure 8.3 *Sample Thank-You Note 2*

Dear Scott,

It was a pleasure meeting you at the BlackRock Cornell Days event on Thursday. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to speak with us. You added a lot of value to the event, and you enabled me to get a better feel for the company culture.

After meeting many different people from BlackRock, I clearly see it as the place where I would be the best fit. I believe my analytical, teamwork, and problem-solving skills would allow me to contribute quickly, and in a meaningful way.

I was especially impressed with what Barbara West said about the importance of integrity, curiosity, and critical thinking, as it resonated quite a bit with me.

Once more, I really enjoyed the event this Thursday and hope to be selected to interview with Blackrock. It was a great pleasure to meet you.

All the best,

Jerry Solomon

Figure 8.4 *Sample Thank-You Note 3*

Dear Mrs. Soulis,

Thank you very much for your time yesterday. I enjoyed the interview very much, and I'd like to reiterate my interest in working for P.S. 23.

I'm especially interested because your school is completely focused on improving student grades and increasing student participation in learning and extracurricular activities. I believe that a child's confidence grows when they participate in sports and drama in addition to their studies.

I'm proud to say that my assistant teaching experience at P.S. 22 has resulted in increased grades and increased participation by students in the first, second, and third grades. I hope I'm given the chance to do that at your school, P.S. 23.

Thank you again for your time and consideration, and I hope to hear from you shortly.

Best regards,

Donna Right

### **Update All Parties Relevant to Your Search**

If you've met other people during your job search and they've been helpful in any way, send them an e-mail update as to how you've progressed. It will mostly likely be shared with others, so take great care when writing *any* note to a company representative.

### **Map Your Follow-Up Strategy**

Once you've interviewed for a position, note your expected follow-up on your calendar. If the company representative said you will be contacted in a week, mark that on your calendar. If you aren't contacted, add another three or four days onto your calendar and then follow up with the company. After that, maintain consistent communication to help produce positive results.

Different ways to keep in touch include the following:

- Thank the company's representative for either the interview or the update.
- Give a results update.
- Send holiday greetings (throughout the year).
- Share an article about the company or about a common interest.
- Express congratulations on positive news about the representative's career or the company.
- Make a referral.

### **Set Up Additional Targets**

You should be working on no fewer than ten targets to ensure you have activity because some targets will get *cold*, while others get *hot*. The recruiting process is, to a large extent, a numbers game. Having more companies in play increases your chances of success.

### **When Things Go Wrong**

Sometimes no matter how well you prepare, something still goes wrong. The following strategies will help you manage when things go amiss:

- If you forget to turn your cell phone off and it rings, apologize and quickly turn off the phone. Don't look at the number of the person calling you.

- If you are late, call in advance to notify the interviewer and ask if the interview can proceed. Apologize when the interview takes place.
- If you have a wardrobe malfunction—a popped button, a run in your stockings, or you spilled coffee on your clothing—a little humor might help.
- If you went on a tangent and did not answer the question directly, check to make sure you are on track or ask that the question be repeated.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Assess your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes, and your goals before you begin the interview process.
- Knowing what to do before, during, and after an interview is critical to your overall success.
- Having a routine that you follow during the days before and the day of the interview will lower stress and increase your chances to succeed.
- The more prepared you are for an interview, the more likely you are to succeed. Control what you can through preparation and practice and when the unexpected happens, you will be in a better position to manage it.
- If things go wrong during an interview, you can take specific steps to regain your composure.
- Sending a thank-you note is a perfect way to thank the interviewer for their time and keep the lines of communication open. Identify something in the interview that you want to highlight in your note, yet keep it short and concise.

## EXERCISES

1. Compare your list of strengths and weaknesses with those of a friend or fellow student. Seek reinforcement that your strengths are indeed your strengths and vice versa.
2. Select your interview outfit, including your suit, shoes, and briefcase or portfolio. When selecting something to wear, make sure your suit is professional and fits well. Preferred colors are navy, beige, and black. In the spring or summer, beige is an acceptable color for women. If you are not sure, ask a salesperson at a professional clothing store.
3. Draft a list of everything that you must do one, two, or three days before an interview and leave nothing to chance.
4. Practice answering a few interview questions, emphasizing the results you have achieved in various situations. Act confident even though you may not feel confident.
5. Draft a thank-you note and ask a friend or someone from career services to review it. Ensure it is grammatically correct in every way: spelling, tenses, and so forth.

## 8.2 Different Types of Interviews

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the three types of interviews you will experience and learn strategies for succeeding at each of them.
2. Learn the difference between behavioral and case interviews.
3. Learn how informational interviews can lead to real interviews, and, at the very least, strong networking contacts.

You can experience three main types of interviews. Become familiar with each type and you will be more prepared and more successful:

1. Behavioral
2. Case
3. Informational



## Behavioral Interview

The vast majority of interview candidates will participate in a **behavioral interview**<sup>8</sup>. Behavioral questions focus on past performances versus hypothetical situations, following the **premise**<sup>9</sup> that past behavior is a clear indicator of future behavior.

Later in this chapter, a comprehensive list is presented of the most-asked behavioral questions, along with strategies to answer them. Just about any other question asked is a derivative of these questions, so carefully review that section and practice your answers. Questions will relate to aspects of your past work and educational experiences. Here are four typical behavioral interview questions:

1. What was the toughest project you ever completed? Tell me about it.
2. Who was the most difficult customer you ever helped? Tell me about that situation.
3. What was your most challenging class? Tell me why it was challenging.
4. Were you ever a member of a team? What was your role, what was the goal of the team project, and did it go smoothly or was there an issue? What was the end result of the project?

The following strategies will help you answer behavioral questions successfully:

8. The most popular form of interviewing, as it is based on specific past performances versus hypothetical situations. Behavioral questions follow the premise that past behavior is a clear indicator of future behavior.
9. A logical conclusion.
10. Your excitement or interest in a topic.
11. You see the positive possibilities in a situation, a person, or an outcome.
12. That you are digressing, or getting further away from the question.

- Never mention anything negative about your past managers, past professors, or past clients. Even if a particular individual was difficult, speak instead about the challenge and the subsequent approval you received when you succeeded in satisfying that person.
- Focus on presenting an image of an **enthusiastic**<sup>10</sup> and **optimistic**<sup>11</sup> problem solver. Interviewers aren't interested in someone who was downtrodden or didn't get along with the team in general.
- Answer questions directly, and include a beginning, a middle, and an end in your answer.
- Quantify your answers whenever possible. For example, if you worked in your school's library and you are asked about this work, include the number of books you managed per day, whether it was ten, one hundred, or one thousand. It's fine to estimate.
- Ensure your answer is tied to the bottom line. Using the library example once more, your answer could include that using the electronic checkout system decreased lost books by 75 percent.
- Focus on the question asked to help you avoid going off on tangents.
- Ask the interviewer to repeat the question if you think you have gone off on a **tangent**<sup>12</sup> or if you didn't quite understand the question.



## Case Interviews

**Case interviews**<sup>13</sup> are predominately used in management consulting, though they are sometimes used in a variety of fields, including financial services, healthcare, consumer products, and education. A case interview is a hypothetical business problem, or *case*, that the interviewee is expected to solve during the interview. The case tests a variety of the interviewee's skills and expertise, including analysis, logic, structuring of a problem, math, accounting or economics knowledge, specific industry knowledge, communication, creativity, and ability to deliver under pressure.

Case interviews might include short questions to estimate the size of a market:

- How many teenage Americans bought hiking boots last year?
- How many Christmas trees are sold in December in California?
- How many disposable cameras are purchased in London on a single day?

The interviewer does not expect you to know the specific answer, but that you estimate a final answer based on different facts (e.g., the population of the United States). The interviewer wants you to break down this broad request into smaller steps that can be calculated to see how you structure a problem. The interviewer is also testing your basic math skills and ability to work under pressure. The following information applies to the question on hiking boots:

- The population of the United States is about 300 million people.
- It is less obvious how many of those are teenagers, so you have to estimate. If life expectancy is approximately eighty years and equal numbers in each decade (ages zero to ten, eleven to twenty, and so forth) are estimated, then there are eight buckets of ages, including a teenage bucket, so the number of people in the teenage years represents 12 to 15 percent of the total population.
- Fifteen percent of 300 million is 45 million, but not every teenager wears hiking boots and not every teenager buys boots every year.
- If you estimate that 25 percent of teenagers wear hiking boots, then teenagers who purchase hiking books number about eleven million.
- If you estimate that a typical hiker buys a new pair every other year, then about five and a half million teenagers buy hiking boots each year.

13. Case interviews are used to understand a candidate's ability to problem solve and develop a strategy to solve a difficult situation.

Remember that the interviewer does not expect a specific answer, but rather wants to see the process you follow to estimate the answer.

Case interviews might also be as long as thirty to forty-five minutes of broad strategy or operations questions about a detailed problem. You may be asked how to manage a hypothetical teaching situation. You may be given a hospital scenario and asked how to streamline processes. You may be given data about the company or industry involved in the question presented. You may be asked to review charts, accounting statements, or other background material, such as in the following question: The CEO of a leading national toy company is considering acquiring a popular neighborhood toy shop in Austin, Texas. How would you advise the CEO whether or not to purchase the shop?

You might then be given more information about the national toy company, or you might be expected to ask for what you need. The questions you ask are part of what the interviewer is testing because your questions reveal the types of data you think are important to assess to make the purchase decision. You are trying to assess if the neighborhood shop fits into the national company's strategy, and, if so, whether the cost of buying and integrating the neighborhood shop will be offset by potential future revenues.

Many large consulting firms, such as McKinsey and Bain, put sample cases and solutions on their websites. Books also offer sample cases and solutions. Many schools offer case-preparation workshops via either career services or extracurricular consulting clubs. Case interviews are very different from general job interviews but are rarely used except for management consulting jobs. Therefore, don't spend any time preparing for case interviews unless you want a management consulting job. If you do want a job in management consulting, case interview practice is absolutely necessary. You will not get hired by a consulting firm without successfully completing several case interviews.

If you are interviewing outside the consulting industry, meet with a friend who is in your chosen profession. Ask them to tell you about when they were interviewed, and ask them to interview you. This can be a tremendous learning experience and can prepare you for success, so your time will be well spent in arranging a mock interview ahead of time.

14. Enable you to gather important research about your desired job. An informational interview is an opportunity for you to ask five to ten questions of someone who is performing the very job you think you want to perform or someone who started out at the same level at which you want to start your career.

## **Informational Interviews**

**Informational interviews**<sup>14</sup>, by their very name, give you the opportunity to gather information about the career you think you want to pursue. The more prepared you are, the better your session will be because the best informational interviews are two-way exchanges, more like a conversation than an interrogation. Your research will allow you to share vital information with your interviewer, and you both will benefit from the time spent.

Some informational interview questions focus on the interviewer:

- How did you get involved in this job, organization, or industry?
- What do you like most about it? What has been most rewarding?
- What is most challenging? Was there anything that surprised you?
- What is a typical day, week, or month?
- What skills are most critical to have, develop, and maintain to be successful?
- What personality types are most successful?
- What do you know now that you wished you knew when you started? (This is a great question to ask because it forces people to reflect on the arc of their career. It is unexpected and people appreciate this question.)

These types of questions establish rapport and will help you dig deeper and learn more about the job, the industry, and the career.

Some informational interview questions focus on the job and career:

- According to my research, the top competitors are [name the competition]. Am I missing anyone you think is significant? Is there a new player I should know about?
- I've read that [name a trend, challenge, or innovation] is a major trend, challenge, or innovation. Does this affect your job or organization? Is this overestimated in the media? Are there are other trends, challenges, or innovations I should be concerned about?
- Compensation isn't the biggest factor in accepting a job, but I'd like to have a better sense of this. I've read that it is customary for people in this job to make [name salary range] and experience [name lifestyle, travel, work culture]. Is that accurate? Are there any nuances to this that are not publicized in the general media?
- According to my research, it is customary for people in this job to have [name skills and experiences]. Is my background of [summarize your skills and experience] competitive? If you had an opening in your group, would you consider me? What do I need to do to improve my chances?
- What department are you in (i.e., the specific name if it's not revealed in their introduction or on their business card)?
- Who oversees this department?
- How does it fit in with the rest of the organization?
- Is this the typical structure or are your competitors organized differently?

- I am doing research on [name another organization] and trying to find who runs the [name department you want]. Do you know anyone there whom I could ask?

Perhaps the most important question to ask during an informational interview is this one:

- I'm currently planning to speak to [name the people]. Should anyone else be on my list? May I use your name when I contact them?

Typical informational interviews lasting about thirty to forty-five minutes can be a vital part of the research you conduct to ensure you are targeting the right types of jobs.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Knowing the different types of interviews is important to succeeding at each.
- A behavioral interview is the most expected interview form for the vast majority of positions. Behavioral interviews rely on past performance as an indication of future performance.
- Case interviews are most widely used for consulting positions. The goal of a case interview is to test your logic and ability to problem solve quickly and effectively.
- Informational interviews, reviewed in [Chapter 6 "Step 3: Conduct In-Depth Research"](#), the section titled Informational Interviews, are a useful way to learn about an industry and a specific job through someone who has built their career in that area. You ask most of the questions, so you must prepare well in advance to get the most amount of information possible and impress the person with whom you are meeting.
- Some interviewers may merge aspects of behavioral and case interviewing into one interview session. Knowing how to succeed at each type of interview is a wise strategy.

## EXERCISES

1. Participate in mock interview workshops given by career services.
2. Practice answering behavioral and case interview questions.
3. Prepare for an informational interview by deciding who you would like to interview and preparing the questions you will ask.
4. Pair up with an interview buddy to practice each type of interview. Critique each other's performance.

## 8.3 Different Methods of Interviewing and Different Interview Venues

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn the pros and cons of live versus phone interviews.
2. Understand strategies that will allow you to maximize your impact during any type of interview.

### Methods of Interviewing

One of four methods might be used to interview you:

1. Live interviews (one-on-one and a panel type)
2. Phone interviews (one-on-one and a panel type)
3. Video or Skype interviews
4. Taped interviews

### Live (One-on-One and a Panel Type)

Live, or face-to-face, interviews, are the most common interview interaction. An increasing trend of recruiters is to pair up with another colleague and have two or more interviewers per interview candidate. Many candidates will end up interviewing before a panel of interviewers, so be prepared for that to happen as well.

You will need to employ all of the strategies outlined earlier in this chapter, in the section titled “Different Types of Interviews.” In addition, here are some specific strategies to employ when you are interviewing with one or more interviewers.

When you are interviewing with only one person, the focus is clear—it’s on one person. Ensure your nonverbal and verbal communication is focused, positive, and results oriented. The more you practice, troubleshoot, and improve, the more you will succeed.

If you are interviewing with two or more interviewers at the same time, focus and practice are just as important, but you can employ a few additional strategies:

- Focus on the person asking the question to ensure you fully understand the question. When you answer, however, look at all interviewers in the room (even if they are not speaking). Use the lighthouse approach, and just as a lighthouse's light scans from side to side, do the same with your eye contact and connect with everyone in the room.
- Practice and helpful critiques for improvement cannot be emphasized enough. Conduct as many **mock interviews**<sup>15</sup> as possible because your skills will improve with each attempt. Practice also will help you strengthen your performance significantly, thus helping you succeed in either gaining a second-round interview or getting an offer.

### Phone (One-on-One and a Panel Type)

Phone interviews are just as important, if not more so, than face-to-face interviews. In down economies, more companies choose to conduct interviews via the phone versus face-to-face to save time, money (if they have to pay your expense to come to their office), and effort. So preparation and practice are key to succeeding on the phone.

Prepare for a phone interview (similar to a regular interview) by taking seven important steps:

1. Research the industry, the company, the competitors, and the interviewer (if possible).
2. Match your strengths to the job description.
3. Practice interview questions, focusing on the results of your projects and tasks.
4. Ask a friend to interview you over the phone so you are used to the medium.
5. Be proactive about discussing your strengths and have concrete examples of how you have used them.
6. Prepare questions for the interviewer.
7. Ask what the next steps will be.

Phone interviews have several advantages:

15. A practice interview. Practice interviews are not conducted by your desired employer, but by a person knowledgeable and familiar with the interview process.

- You can focus more on the actual questions because you have fewer distractions:
  - The surroundings
  - The interviewer

- You can treat the interview like an open-book test and have several items at hand to help you:
  - A copy of your résumé
  - A list of your strengths and examples of each one
  - A list of your weaknesses and your plan to strengthen each

Since many companies save time and money by conducting phone interviews, spend the time now to master success strategies as it will benefit you in the long run!

Phone interviews have some disadvantages:

- You lose your ability to make a first great impression visually.
- You lose the ability to impress with body language such as eye contact, a good handshake, and so forth.
- You cannot read the interviewer's body language.
- You might become confused if more than one person is asking questions, especially if a speakerphone is used.
- You might be left in the awkward position of not knowing what to do next if the recruiter doesn't value phone interviews as much as face-to-face interviews. They might reschedule or not call when they said they would.

Strategies for a successful phone interview include the following:

- Ensure your office or interview space will be quiet and uninterrupted.
  - Put a note over your doorbell—"Do not ring from 2–3:00 p.m."
  - Put a note on your door—"Do not disturb—interview in progress from 2–3:00 p.m."
  - Ask someone to walk your dog for the hour you are on the phone, or put it in a fenced backyard. If you have a cat with a loud meow, put it in another room where it cannot be heard.
  - Stop call waiting—check with your carrier as to how to do this.
  - Shut off cell phones.
- Dress up even though you don't have to:
  - You will feel more professional.
  - You will take the interview more seriously.



- Stand up during the interview:
  - Your voice sounds better.
  - Your focus will be keener.
- Have a glass of water handy.
- Have your important documents and whatever else you might need in front of you because the interviewer can hear you gather things during the interview.
- Remember that body language is important:
  - Smile when you would normally smile in a live interview. Interviewers can hear a smile and smiles enhance the interview experience.
  - Use inflection in your voice because a monotone makes for a dull interview.

### **Videoconference or Skype Interview**

When you are at a more senior level, interviews might take place with someone in a different city, state, or even overseas. In such a case, a videoconference or **Skype**<sup>16</sup> interview may be used. You will be seated in front of a computer with a camera and your interview will be live via that camera.

Strategies to succeed during a videoconference interview include the following:

- When answering questions, look into the camera instead of looking at the person on the screen. If you look at the camera, your eyes will meet the eyes of the person on the other end of the computer, making for a better connection. If you look at the person on the computer monitor when answering the question, you will appear to be looking down. It's tempting to look at the person's face versus the camera because you want to read their impression, but try to avoid this.
- Practice this technique by speaking to a friend via Skype. It's the exact same medium as a teleconferenced interview, and will give you the much-needed practice.
- Posture is very important, as it is with all interviews, but especially in a videoconference because the interviewer will see you from the shoulders up.

16. A software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. Calls are free if both participants use Skype. Skype has also become popular for its additional features, including videoconferencing.

## Taped Interviews

Taped interviews are so rarely used that you probably will not encounter them. They are primarily used to hire a large number of people for the same exact position, for example, sales positions. If a company has a goal to hire one hundred or five hundred salespeople, a taped interview saves them time in reviewing candidate answers, since all the questions might be the same. Taped interviews are also helpful when hiring salespeople in different parts of the country because taped interviews save the enormous expense of flying interviewers from city to city to find the best possible candidates.

Companies that use taped interviews may direct you to a **satellite office**<sup>17</sup> where the taping takes place. You would be seated opposite a computer or computer kiosk, and you would be given an overview of the process. Taped interviews could involve timed responses, so the pressure could be high. Remember these types of interviews are rare, but it is good to know they exist and how they are formatted.

Strategies to succeed in taped interviews include the following:

- Practice taping yourself before a taped interview using a **Flip Video**<sup>18</sup> or ask a friend to tape you. This can give you much-needed practice that other candidates might not have.
- Review the instructions carefully before proceeding because taped interviews are often timed.
- Focus intently on the question because you will not be able to clarify it.

## Interview Venues

Knowing the four different types of interview venues will help ensure your success:

1. On campus
2. Off campus
3. In a corporate office or conference room
4. During a meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner)

17. Regional offices that are not the headquarters of a company.

18. A product that easily allows you to take a video yourself or others. Different types of Flip Videos are available and costs range from \$100 to \$230.

### On Campus

If your interview takes place on campus, you will probably receive instructions from your career services office regarding the date and time of the interview. Check with the office to ensure you know how you will be notified. Most career services offices have a general check-in area, a waiting area, and very small interview

rooms. It's best to practice in these rooms ahead of time, so you know exactly what to expect. Some rooms are literally five feet by five feet.

### **Off Campus**

If your interview takes place off campus, the company with which you are interviewing will send instructions regarding where to report and when. Ensure you know exactly how to get there, and arrive early if at all possible because you probably will need to go through security. Bring the interview schedule with you; it should include the name(s) of the individuals with whom you will interview and their contact information.

If you need to travel via train or plane to an interview, dress professionally on the way there. Wearing yoga pants and flip-flops doesn't make a good impression, and there is always a chance you will bump into company representatives during your trip.

### **In a Corporate Office or Conference Room**

Most often, candidates will be interviewed in the interviewer's office, but there are times when you will be interviewed in a conference room. Some conference rooms are glass-enclosed areas, and it can be distracting to interview as individuals look in and walk by. Regardless of the setting, maintain your focus on the questions asked and the interview at hand.

### **During a Meal**

Mealtime interviews can be tricky situations because food and drink are involved. Strike a healthy balance of not being ravenous but not leaving your plate untouched either. Focus your full attention on the conversation and interview at hand. It is wise to stay away from messy marinara sauces and long strings of pasta because they can easily stain your clothing. Forgo alcohol at all costs and certainly if you are not of legal age to consume alcohol. If you are not comfortable with dining etiquette, familiarize yourself with it to increase your comfort level. Know which fork is correct to use for salad versus dinner. Research this so you are prepared in advance. Interviews that take place during a meal can heighten nerves and cause you to spill a glass of water, which doesn't bode well for your confidence level. Practice can only help, so try to attend a dining etiquette class or study proper techniques to ensure a good impression.

No matter what the venue, dress well and take extra copies of your résumé, a portfolio with paper and a pen that works, a list of questions you will ask, and perhaps a bottle of water just in case you need it.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Knowing the different types of interviews is important to succeeding at each. Knowing the pros and cons to live and phone interviews can ensure you get a second interview or perhaps the job offer.
- Having a one-on-one interview is very different from having to interview before a panel of people. Researching the individuals who will interview you can decrease your stress and help you perform optimally.
- Some interviewers may merge aspects of behavioral and case interviewing into one interview session. Knowing how to succeed at each is a wise strategy.
- Your interview venue affects the interview dynamics, so preparing in advance can only help.

### EXERCISES

1. Participate in any mock interview sessions held by your school's career services office.
2. Find a peer at your school with whom to practice, if workshops aren't available in career services. Interview your classmate and then critique their responses. Also have your peer interview you and critique your responses.
3. Practice a phone interview with a friend and vice versa. It's great practice before a live phone interview.
4. Practice interviewing on campus in the career services office so you can be comfortable with the venue.
5. Ask someone in career services to interview you in their office so you can be comfortable with that particular setting.
6. Practice a mealtime interview with your interview buddy during breakfast or lunch.

## 8.4 Different Types of Questions

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn the three distinct types of interview questions.
2. Understand how to answer each type of question confidently and stress a results-oriented approach.

Interviewers are most likely to ask one of four types of questions:

1. Open-ended questions
2. Specific questions
3. Motivation questions
4. Unconventional questions



19. Discriminatory, including questions that touch on the following information: age, birthplace, childcare arrangements, ethnicity and race, disability, marital and family status, national origin, and religion.

Lastly, we'll review **illegal questions**<sup>19</sup> that hopefully will not be a part of your interviews.

## Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions don't have specific answers. They include questions like the following:

- Tell me about yourself. Walk me through your career. Why did you make the choices you made?

Such questions present an opportunity to tell your story in an engaging, articulate, and compelling way. Explain why you selected the school(s) you selected, your major and your minor, and your GPA (if it's above 3.3). Describe the jobs you've had and how you got them. Did you apply directly or did you get them through networking? What were your most significant accomplishments at each job? Highlight significant accomplishments that may or may not be explicit in your résumé. Often, a theme will emerge, but if that isn't the case, talk about your decisions in a positive light.

- With which skills and functions are you most comfortable? If I were to assign you a project based on your expertise, what would I give you?

If you enjoy working with clients, talk about your specific achievements and how you helped your clients. Have you served them well enough for them to be repeat customers? Have they referred other clients to you? If you are very strong analytically, give an example of the most analytical project on which you've worked and the project's outcome.

- What are your weakest skills, and how are you addressing them? What areas would your supervisors say you need to develop?

Everyone has strengths and everyone has weaknesses. You should do a substantive assessment of your weaknesses prior to an interview. A weakness should never be a critical component of the job for which you are applying. If there is a trick to answering this question effectively, it's to highlight what you are doing to strengthen each weakness. For example, if public speaking is something you consider a weakness, you can say that to improve this, you raise your hand as much as possible in class, and you volunteer to present whenever possible. The more prepared you are with the content of your presentation, the better you perform.

- What do you do for fun? What do you do in your free time? What do you like to read?

These questions present an opportunity to enthusiastically and specifically discuss what you enjoy doing in your spare time. If you enjoy tennis, talk about how long you have been playing and your favorite player. If you enjoy reading, mention the last great book you read.

## Specific Questions

Specific questions have concrete answers and might include the following:

- Tell me about this [the interviewer can point to anything on your résumé, whether it be a project, an employer, a class, a skill, or a hobby].

You must be able to quickly and completely discuss any topic from your résumé and its relevance to your professional career. You should be able to recount every detail about each project, and enthusiastically relay those details to your interviewer. If you are not enthusiastic about your work, they will not be either. Also highlight the result of your work or any project about which they want to know more.

- Tell me about your favorite project, your most significant project, or a project that demonstrates your leadership, project management, analytical, research, or communications skills.

When answering this question, remember who sponsored the project, the project's objective and deliverable, steps you took to complete the project, and the results of your efforts. Note your role as well as the roles of other team members. Be specific and quantify the results.

- Tell me about a project where something went wrong or tell me about a difficult client.

Everyone has worked on projects where something went wrong. If we procrastinated, we learned to become more disciplined in our approach to projects. If someone didn't do their part of the project, which then caused us to do extra work, we learned to communicate more clearly and check the project's progress on a regular basis.

We also have worked with difficult clients. The trick is to not say anything negative about a client. If a client was demanding, remember that all clients have a right to make demands. We need to raise our game to ensure they are pleased with the

service and our level of professionalism. Never make negative comments about a client, a boss, a peer, or a company. Doing so sends an immediate red flag to the interviewer, so avoid such negativity at all costs. Position everything in a positive light, which can only help your candidacy.

- What do you think about current events or significant events in the employer's industry?

Interviewers want to know that you are knowledgeable about current events, especially those pertaining to their industry. The very best candidates are well versed in the current news, so be prepared to discuss one or two items. It's important that you cite the source of the news and what you learned from it. If you did subsequent research about the topic, discuss that as well. It's an opportunity to highlight your research and your passion for this industry.

### **Motivation Questions**

Interviewers often want to know about a candidate's motivation by asking the following questions:

- With which firms are you interviewing? What positions are you seeking? How will you choose?

The most savvy interviewers know that the best candidates interview with multiple companies. Many candidates are comfortable discussing specific companies with which they are interviewing, and, from a recruiting perspective, it's fine to mention the company names. If you would rather not discuss this, mention that you are currently interviewing with other companies, but this company is your number one choice and highlight why you want to work there. They should get the hint that you don't want to mention specific companies.

No matter what company is interviewing you, ensure that you know why you want to work for that particular company. Know their strong points and know their competitors. Know clearly why you want to work for them versus their competitors.

- What do you hope to accomplish in your career? Where do you see yourself in one, five, or more years?

Your research will help you answer this question. If you've conducted some informational interviews, you will have a clear idea of what a career can look like in



one, five, and ten years. It is also important to network with peers who have interned at the companies in which you are interested because they can share specific information with you. For example, consulting, investment banking, and brand management have well-defined career paths. Advertising has a defined career path, but it may not be as defined as other businesses and industries.

Additional sources of information on this topic can be gathered on various job-seeker sites such as <http://www.vault.com> and <http://www.wetfeet.com>. Career services can be a huge resource, as can alumni who are in the industries in which you are most interested.

- What questions do you have for the interviewer?

This can be a make-or-break question because some interviews consist of just this one question. Every interview candidate should enter an interview with five to seven questions written down in advance. These questions should come directly from your research.

- Why do you want this position? Why do you want to work with this company?

Answers to these questions will come from your research. Have a specific reason you want to work at the company doing the exact job for which you are interviewing. Is the brand name very strong, giving you an opportunity to work with the best? Is the brand name not yet a household name, giving you an opportunity to make it so?

It's also important to know what skills you will gain in this specific position and which will enable you to be successful. Will the position strengthen your analytical skills? Will it enable you to become a subject-matter expert? Be specific in your answer.

### **Unconventional Questions**

Some interviewers may think you are too rehearsed and may want to inject a bit of stress; perhaps they want to shake you up a bit by asking what may seem to be crazy or certainly bizarre interview questions:

- If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be? Why?
- If you were a car, what color would you be? Why?

- If you were an item in the supermarket, what item would you be? Why?
- If you were an animal, what kind of animal would you be? Why?

Note that these questions are rare and you probably will not be asked them, but since preparation is key, it's worth examining why they are asked. These types of questions are asked to get a true glimpse into your personality. The "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be and why?" question could be answered the following way:

- If you were a corporate research analyst who relied purely on your research to describe a stock, and that research would be shared with hundreds of portfolio managers, you might say you were a redwood tree. A redwood is one of the strongest trees on the planet and has roots that grow hundreds of feet into the ground. Not even the strongest of winds can cause the redwood to sway.
- If you were applying to be a technology customer service representative who troubleshoots during their entire day, you may say that you were a palm tree. A palm tree bends and yields to gentle breezes and hurricanes alike, but it survives almost anything that comes its way and stands tall and straight the minute the wind stops.



The two types of trees have very different characteristics, yet they both survive and thrive.

Unconventional questions have no correct answer, but when asked them, four strategies can help you succeed:

1. Practice answering a few of these types of questions. If you need a few minutes to consider your answer during an interview, it's fine to ask for a bit of time.
2. Answer by showing something positive or beneficial about you and your personality.
3. Avoid humor and answer the question seriously and sincerely.
4. Work backward to the answer. Think about a characteristic that is important to the job, and then match it to a tree, a fruit, or an item in a supermarket.

## Illegal Questions

Illegal or discriminatory questions include references to the following:

- Age
- Birthplace
- Childcare arrangements
- Ethnicity and race
- Disability
- Marital and family status
- National origin
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

If you are asked any question relating to the preceding topics, it could be for one of two reasons. Either the interviewer is asking an illegal question or the interviewer might not be well versed in interview techniques. Many hiring managers have not been formally trained in interview techniques, and that lack of training can result in asking an illegal question.

It is hoped that the question would be harmless enough so that you can answer it without feeling uncomfortable. If you feel uncomfortable answering something, tactfully say that the question doesn't relate to the job. Try to move onto another question or ask a question pertaining to the job to get the interview back on track.

If you feel that you were subjected to discrimination, speak to someone at your career services office. They could provide the guidance necessary at this stage of your job search. If that is not possible, consult a friend or professor and ask for

guidance in your next steps. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, so it's important to get help from someone who is familiar with these issues.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interviewers are most likely to ask one of three types of questions: (1) open ended, (2) specific, and (3) motivation questions.
- Unconventional interview questions might be asked, and you must be able to spontaneously answer them.
- It's wise to know what questions are illegal in case they are asked.

### EXERCISES

1. Practice answering each of the open-ended, specific, and motivation questions, ensuring that you use specific examples for each.
2. Practice the unconventional interview questions as well. Ensure that you tie the positive traits of the object (such as a tree) to key components of the skills needed for the job.
3. Review questions that are illegal. If you are asked one of these questions during an interview, follow up with your career services office.

## 8.5 Avoid Interviewer Pet Peeves

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why recruiters might be annoyed at certain interview behavior and learn how to avoid unpleasant interactions of any kind.
2. Learn about the importance of body language and practice until your body language is positive and impressive.
3. Learn strategies to keep your energy positive and strong throughout the interview day.

A number of things can annoy an interviewer and must be avoided at all costs. The following includes a list of things you should not do. Mock interviews are especially helpful at this stage because sometimes candidates are not aware they are doing things that are clear turnoffs to interviewers, so proceed with caution.

### Not Being Prepared

Being unprepared is an insult to the interviewer who is investing their time and energy into meeting with you. You should be there on time, have several copies of your résumé in your portfolio, focus on answering any question asked, and have a list of questions to ask at the end of the interview.

### Negative Body Language

Positive body language such as looking the interviewer in the eye and shaking their hand firmly when saying hello inspires trust. Poor body language can eliminate you as a potential candidate. Practice answering questions with a friend and look them straight into the eye. Smile when you talk about big goals that you have achieved. You may look away now and then, but for the most part hold their gaze throughout the interview. Sit up straight in an attentive position to help ensure you make a good impression.

### Appearing Tense

Stress is a vital component of an interview because you want the job and you need to impress. Using that stress to perform better is key, and, with practice, you can appear more relaxed than you actually are. For example, if your palm sweats a bit, discreetly wipe your hand on your pants leg or skirt before you shake the

interviewer's hand. Preparing in advance usually lowers stress, but if you still need additional methods to calm yourself before an interview, try listening to soothing music before entering the building or read something inspirational before the interview. Taking deep breaths before you enter the building can lower stress a great deal.

### **Not Focusing on the Question and Not Answering It Directly**

If your interviewer asks for a one- to two-minute overview, don't spend six to eight minutes regurgitating your résumé. Focus and listen carefully to everything the interviewer asks you. If they ask for a one- to two-minute overview, make sure you give them one to two minutes. If you feel you might be going on a tangent and not answering the question, it's fine to ask if you are going in the right direction, or you can ask the recruiter to repeat the question and start over. Practice is important, even when you practice going off the topic.

### **Waning Energy**

The interview process is strenuous. If you interview with one person, it's easy to keep your energy up. However, some interviews might be set up where you will interview with multiple people or several individual people throughout the day, and, in some cases, on different floors and in different buildings. Your energy level must be as strong and consistent with your seventh interview as it was with your first. To avoid **waning energy**<sup>20</sup>, bring a small bottle of water with you to help you feel refreshed. If your interview day will be several hours long, bring a small snack bar to help you stay alert.

### **Blaming Others for Your Poor Performance**

Putting anyone or anything in a negative light is not a good strategy for an interview. Criticizing your past peers, boss, or company puts you in a negative light. Interviewers red flag any type of negative comment and might probe for more negative energy lurking in other interview responses.

### **Not Treating Everyone with Respect**

Treat everyone you meet during the day with the utmost respect, whether it is the security guard, the administrative assistant, or the actual interviewer. Be respectful if you are trying to rush through security or if you are holding an elevator for someone. All of these individuals communicate with each other, and if you leave a bad impression with any of them, it could end your candidacy. Be courteous and kind to everyone you meet. Manners do count.

20. You start off at a high level of energy and your energy then trails off and lowers noticeably.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The more prepared you are to execute an exceptional interview, the better are your chances of getting another interview or an offer.
- The interview process can be exhausting, so ensure you have strategies to keep your energy high.
- Focusing during the interview process is critical to success. Answering questions directly is the best way to showcase your strengths.

### EXERCISES

1. Practice focusing on the exact questions asked by an interviewer to avoid going off track in any way.
2. Practice positive body language for interviews. Ensure you are comfortable in your interview suit, whether you are sitting at a desk or sitting on a couch in the interviewer's office.
3. Ensure that all your interview responses are positive and relevant. You can practice this during an interview workshop or with an interview buddy. You can also print the top ten to fifteen interview questions and record your responses, and then strengthen each of your answers after you listen to them.

## 8.6 Chapter Review and Exercises

Control what you can control, and your interview will be more successful. This includes doing the following, but this list is far from exhaustive:

- Assess your strengths and weaknesses before the interview.
- Research the company and its competitors in advance of your meeting.
- Prepare and practice interview questions.
- Create a routine for the day of the interview to ensure you don't rush or skip important steps.
- Write down five to seven questions to ask at the end of your interview to prove you are motivated to get this job offer.

Remember that interviews are **subjective**<sup>21</sup> and that a second interview is never a guarantee. Budgets can shift and your targeted company may have to pull an open requisition. Perhaps the company wants to promote from within and they may hire an internal candidate. Many interviewers hire in their own image, regardless of any interviewer training course they may attend. No matter what happens at the end of your interview, it's important to stay positive and it's equally important to not take it personally.

Regardless of the interview's outcome, and especially if you don't get the job, thank the interviewer for the interaction. Continue to keep in touch because that person can become an important part of your network. Leaving a positive impression can only help your future prospects because jobs for which you would be a perfect fit might open in the near term. Remember also that recruiters and hiring managers tend to move from company to company, and there is a strong likelihood that your paths may cross again. Maintaining positive relationships can only help your career.

Lastly, if you interview for a position and you don't get it, at least appreciate the value and practice of your experience. Troubleshoot what could have gone better and improve on that one thing. If you are proactive enough at strengthening your interview ability and ensuring you have enough interviews lined up, you increase your chances of getting a job offer. Once that happens, you will probably be in the interviewer's seat before long.

21. An interviewer can make up their mind based on nonscientific data. They can have a preconceived notion of you as a candidate that has nothing to do with your strengths.



## Chapter Takeaways

- Before you even think of interviewing, you must know three things:
  1. Know yourself.
  2. Know your résumé well enough to enthusiastically speak about every minute detail.
  3. Know the company, the position, and the industry for which you are interviewing.
- Knowing what to do before an interview is key to your success:
  - Research the industry, the company, the competitors, and the interviewer (if possible).
  - Practice the interview questions.
  - Have a full dress rehearsal three days before the interview.
  - Know where you are going in advance and ensure you show up early.
  - Have a routine for the day of the interview.
- Knowing what to do during an interview is critical:
  - Maintain positive body language.
  - Update your networking.
  - Maintain your focus.
  - Be authentic.
  - Prepare questions to ask toward the end of the interview.
  - Ask what the next step will be.
- Knowing what to do after an interview can strengthen your chances of getting the job:
  - Send a thank-you note.
  - Update all parties relevant to your search.
  - Map out your follow-up strategy.
- Things can go wrong during an interview. Knowing how to get back on track is vital to your interview success.
- Interviews can be very structured or very unstructured, depending on the interviewer and the industry.
- The best way to succeed in any interview is to prepare for every type of interview and every type of interviewer.

- Interviews can be one of three types:
  1. Behavioral interviews
  2. Case interviews
  3. Informational interviews
- Interviews can be conducted using different methods:
  - Live interviews
  - Phone interviews
  - Videoconference or Skype interviews
  - Taped interviews
- The venue will be either on campus or off campus and in either an office or a conference room.
- Some interviewers are more skilled at the interview process than others, so having a planned approach helps ensure your strengths are highlighted in the interview.
- You need to be prepared to answer various types of interview questions in advance of the interview:
  - Open-ended questions
  - Specific questions
  - Motivation questions
  - Unusual questions
- Familiarize yourself with questions that are considered illegal.
- Avoid interviewer pet peeves to ensure maximum success during the interview process. Some of these include not being prepared, not having positive body language, and not being enthusiastic, among others.

## Chapter Review

1. How do you define an interview?
2. What should you know about yourself before you actually interview for a position?
3. What is the structure of a typical interview and what are some reasons an interview might be unstructured?
4. Why is it important to prepare and practice?
5. What are the most important things to do before an interview?
6. How important is having a routine to follow on the day of the interview?
7. What is body language and how can you use it to your advantage?
8. When answering interview questions, why is it more effective to have a beginning, a middle, and an end to your response?
9. What types of things can go wrong during an interview, and what can you do to get them back on track?
10. What three things should you do after an interview?
11. Why are thank-you notes important and how do you write an effective thank-you note?
12. Why are the three main types of interviews?
13. How do you prepare for an informational interview, and what are the main benefits to conducting them?
14. What are the four different methods of interviewing?
15. Why are more and more interviewers choosing to conduct phone interviews versus face-to-face interviews?
16. What are the pros and cons of phone interviews?
17. What is the difference between on-campus and off-campus interviewing? Why should you participate in both?
18. How can you practice the most-asked interview questions?
19. What strategies would you use to answer open-ended questions versus specific questions versus motivation questions?
20. Why would an interviewer use unconventional interview questions, and what is the best way to practice answering them?
21. What constitutes an illegal question, and what should you do if you are asked an illegal question during an interview?
22. What interviewer pet peeves can you avoid?

## SuccessHawk: Interview

For tips and ideas about preparing for interviews, click on Interviews in the Advice and Research Section of the menu bar on the right. You may also want to review the demo using Perfect Interview, an interactive online interview practice feature under Interactive Features. (Note: There is a charge of \$19.95 for unlimited use of Perfect Interview for sixty days.)

The screenshot shows the SuccessHawk website interface. At the top, the logo 'SUCCESS+HAWK' is displayed with the tagline 'JOB SEARCH PRODUCTIVITY SOLUTIONS' and a hawk icon. Navigation links for 'My Workspace' and 'Logout ( SuccessHawk Demo )' are in the top right. A blue banner with the word 'Interviewing' and a breadcrumb 'Home » Interviewing' is prominent. Below this, the 'Interview Preparation' section includes an introductory paragraph, a sub-section 'Types of Interviews', and a list of links: 'Preparing for an Interview', 'Interview Questions to Anticipate At the Interview', 'Questions for You to Ask', 'Ending the Interview', and 'The Informational Interview'. On the right, a 'My Contacts' section is visible, followed by a 'Advice & Research' menu with links like 'Career Exploration', 'Resumes', 'Letter Templates', 'Search Job Listings', 'Interviewing', and 'Managing a Layoff Guide to Networking'. Below that is an 'Interactive Features' menu with links for 'My Workspace', 'My Contacts', 'My Action Items', 'Goal Setting', 'Personal Statements', and 'Resume Creator'.