



CHAPTER

19

PRACTICING FOR YOUR INTERVIEWS:

Preparation – Presentation – Evaluation

Was my interview a success?

The best way to learn interviewing is to become physically and mentally involved in doing planning activities. This is equivalent to practicing in athletics and music.

The most effective way to learn any subject area is to physically get involved. Reading alone seldom is the most effective approach to learning. You learn best from what you do. Just do it!

An interview is a valuable asset. You never want to destroy your valuable assets. They all count. Role-playing and simulation can help you polish your techniques.

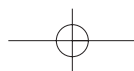
An interview is similar to an athletic championship event. You get one chance at winning the final event. You prepare for the event by practice. There are many ways to approach the interview practice. *You need to control* the interview.

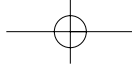
One excellent way to approach the interview preparation is enhanced by simulating interviews. The “Interview Action Projects” are designed to improve your interview performance.

A well-planned and perfectly executed interview is the backbone of the job search. Perfection comes from preparation that includes research, organization, and practicing. One of the best ways to prepare for interviews is by doing the following practical exercises. The tactical projects will enhance your interviews.

Interview Career Action Projects

The purpose of conducting interview projects is to guarantee you the highest level of interviewing success. The interview is the most critical element of





your career planning. The “yes” and “no” decisions by interviewers determine your job possibilities.

A “yes” decision is what you want. Although a “no” decision is not a catastrophe, it is important feedback. Were your self-assessment, career exploration, and search strategy analysis sound?

Interviews are reality tests. A series of “no” decisions would necessitate a review of your earlier career planning decisions. Are you in the right career?

The goal is to get *several* “yes” decisions from your independent evaluators. Your decision to accept or reject offers is made on a “rolling basis” after you’ve collected several offers. There are many variables that you must consider in your decision of which opportunity to accept.

Simulations and Execution

Your major interview activity has been planning. Now it is *execution* time. You are dealing with the interview season; like a baseball season. Although you can afford to lose a few ballgames, the championship will not come to you if you suffer too many losses.

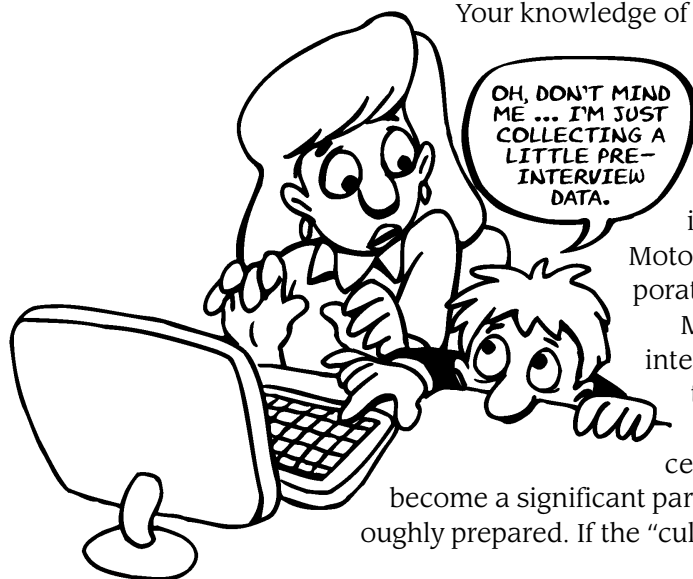
You do not want to lose *any* games. Only with the determination to win (get a job offer) each time will the championship be within your reach.

Once the season starts, there are no practice games. Every interview is for real. Planning, evaluating, role-playing, and practicing under *make-believe* circumstances is your best option.

A live job lead is a valuable asset. It must be nurtured. You cannot practice with a real asset because the asset gets eliminated. Several exercises can help. Practice before you interview.

There are many things you can do to practice for interviews. One approach is to use exercises that simulate interviews. Exercises lay the groundwork for successful interviews. The following projects are techniques that will sharpen your interviewing skills to the highest possible level.

Preparation

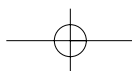


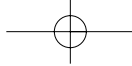
Your knowledge of an organization is the best indicator of your real level of interest. Most employers believe in their organizations. They are loyal and committed. That is the assumption you must make.

In an interview, the employer is assessing you as a potential member of a close-knit family. Even if the organization is huge, like General Motors, there is a certain *esprit de corps* in overall corporate image and in smaller work groups.

Most employers believe that if you are sincerely interested in working for the organization, you will thoroughly investigate what it has to offer before you take an interview. Assuming that you receive and accept an offer, the organization will

become a significant part of your life. It is in your best interest to be thoroughly prepared. If the “culture” right for you?





An in-depth analysis of an organization is the foremost activity that you must do before every interview.

The depth of your preparation for interviews will vary depending upon your time, assessment of your chances, and desire to work for the organization. Preparation is the key variable in interview success.

Cursory attention to preparation usually results in turndown decisions. Few employers hire people for managerial, technical, or professional assignments who do not express a very high interest in working for them. Saying that you are interested, and proving it by your actions, are two very different, and easily evaluated circumstances.

Projects lead you through a complete analysis of an organization. However, the experience of doing just one project will help you to prepare for other interviews without the same level of extensive research.

The purpose of an interview exercise is to show you how to approach the task of preparing. The *method* is the secret. Once you have conducted this method of analysis. The data collection in subsequent interview preparations will be routine and quick.

The two preparation exercises below involve three steps:

- Selecting an employer
- Collecting data
- Writing an analysis

Select any employer in business, government, or education. For this exercise, selection of a large, well-known employer makes the data collection process somewhat easier.

By now you have selected a career field and narrowed your selection of a specific job target compatible with your background. Make sure that your specific job target is applicable to you. You will be collecting information on both the employer and the job.

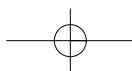
Data Collection. There is a massive amount of information available on the employer you have selected. Your goal is to collect this information from a variety of sources.

The following sources of information are available in college career offices, the Internet, state employment offices, stock brokerage firms, public libraries, and current news publications, as well as from the employer and employees of the organization.

www.vault.com
www.wetfeet.com
www.hoovers.com
www.jobweb.org
www.collegejournal.com

Annual Report. Every public business is required to publish an annual report. It is always available from the employer's public relations department and the Internet. Most government agencies and specific departments also publish such documents. Although they are not always called annual reports, many educational and quasi-public organizations make such documents available about their operations as well.

Employment Brochure. Organizations that employ several hundred people usually find it convenient to prepare a publication that describes the





organization to potential employees. Usually, these describe the types of opportunities normally available. They discuss job requirements in some detail. They are available from HR offices and can be obtained by writing or viewing them on the world wide web. Nearly every employer with a web page has a “careers” section.

Investment Reports. Many investment firms conduct and publish analyses of public business firms whose stock is available for purchase. These firms analyze the stock. The analyses can be very valuable in assessing the immediate and long-term employment opportunities. If applicable, try to obtain the *Value Line Investment Survey*, *Standard and Poor's*, and *Moody's* reports. These three firms provide excellent analyses for employment purposes. The web contains much of this information.

Job Advertisements. Many organizations regularly place classified advertisements inviting people to apply for jobs. If possible, obtain some that pertain to your field, whether they are current or not. Good sources are Sunday metropolitan newspapers, the *Wall Street Journal*, trade and association magazines, college placement office job bulletins, and the Internet.

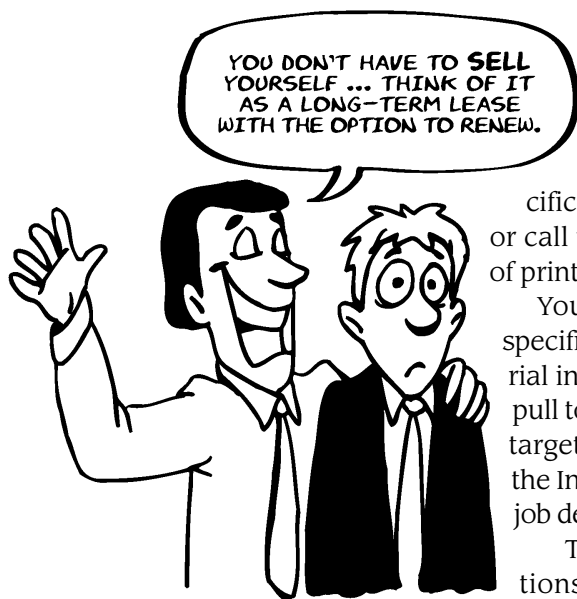
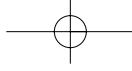
Advertisements. Other excellent sources of information are product and/or service advertisements. These may be in magazines (popular and trade) and newspapers.

Most firms will send you brochures about their products and services if you write and request them. These give you a much broader image of the organization's reputation, quality, and breadth of products and services. The Internet typically contains this data also.

News. Most large organizations, whether business or government, are frequently mentioned in newspapers and magazines. Clip out or copy everything you see on your target employer. For business firms, check the library's *Business Periodical Index*. Magazines like *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Barron's*, *Financial World*, *Business Week*, and *The Wall Street Journal* frequently contain articles on specific firms. Check issues from the past 18 months. They are on the Internet.

Interviews. Many times no information is publicly available especially for small organizations. Many of them will, however, be happy to provide information if you ask for it. Write, call, or visit and ask for some specific information.

Do not mention that your desire for information has anything to do with a desire for an interview later. Keep the interview and preparation separate. You can also obtain information from current employees. Write down all of your findings.



Job Descriptions. Collect as much information on the organization as you can. You also need information on the job(s). That information is more difficult to obtain, but attainable.

Job descriptions are usually only available from specific departments and the human resource departments. Write or call the specific department and see if you can obtain a copy of printed material on related jobs.

You need not confine your search for job information to a specific employer. You can do much generalizing from the material in this book and the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. Try to pull together as much material as possible that is related to your targeted job. Use a search engine to locate job descriptions on the Internet. Even job positions sometimes will show you a brief job description, which you can get from www.careeronestop.org.

This material can even be obtained from other organizations. The actual functions do not differ that much from employer to employer. The document that you put together for this interview preparation will also be useful in interviews with other organizations. Generic job descriptions also work.

Hoovers Online

www.hoovers.com

Hoovers, "the company that covers companies," offers a website with useful information to assist the job seeker in his or her search. The Career Center section offers links to over 12,000 company profiles, job openings, job search tools and to a career links section with useful tools like a salary calculator, relocation guides, and job hunting tips.

Employer Data Collection

You now should have a very extensive file of information on your targeted employer. The next step is to bring this information together in a way that can be useful for your interview.

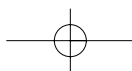
Your goal is to develop an informative, interesting, and attractive display of the information. It may turn out to be something you will share with the employer.

Whether you use it in that manner would depend upon considerations such as who the interviewer is, the results of the interview, its appropriateness, the location of the interview, and so forth.

The most important reason for developing this extensive profile is that it will give you concrete data. You do not want to pick a work partner without knowing the facts. You may spend years with the employer.

Evaluate the employer in the same way as if you were picking a business partner and risking all of your financial resources. Much of your future financial resources may derive from your association with this employer.

The selection of an employer is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Over time, the selection of an employer may be more important than the selection of a career. Upward promotions and lateral transfers may become important components in your career success.





Employer Profile Interview Project

Prepare an employer profile. The employer profile should be printed to make it more readily accessible, attractive, and useful. The profile should be about three to five pages in length. In essence, you are producing a resume on the employer. You might want to follow a simple resume style. The elements of the profile and brief descriptions of them are given in Figure 19.1. Use it as your guide.

Not all of the elements will pertain to all types of employers, and there may be other categories that would be useful to summarize for some employers. The profile analysis is flexible. After you have completed this project you will be very knowledgeable about the organization.

If the employer comes to the conclusion that you are qualified, interested, and strongly motivated to do the job, you will get an offer. Getting the offer is your goal. You need specific job information to best prepare your presentation.

You are unlikely to obtain the exact information you need from the employer. You will probably have to make some educated guesses about job content and other facets of the opportunity. The Internet should be your best research resource.

Job Description Interview Action Project

Prepare a job description. Your career exploration also provides extensive information about this. Write a job description for the job for which you are applying with this specific employer using Figure 19.2 as a guide.

www.careeronestop.org
www.careerleader.com
www.careerbuilder.com
www.careers-in-business.com
www.wetfeet.com

www.fortune.com
www.jobdescriptions.com
www.salary.com
www.collegejournal.com
www.vault.com

Employer Profile

Create a profile on your potential employers.

Employer: Give name, address, and other contact information on the organization.

General Information: Briefly explain the nature of the business. Mention any international operations and give the approximate number of employees. Note the locations of the greatest concentrations of employees and operations if extensive.

History: Indicate the founding, key early leaders, impact on community and/or public, and the significance of history to today's operation.

Products/Services: Discuss the line of business or operations. Mention all principal products and services and indicate the percentage of their market share and percentage of the firm total sales. Cover the scope of marketing/distribution and the perceived product/service quality reputation.

Structure: Briefly describe the basic organizational structure. What functions report to other functions? Where does the department or function you are interested in fit into the organizational structure?

Industry: Identify specific competitors or employers in comparable operations. Try to indicate the relative ranking of size and quality within that grouping.

Size: Get a handle on the scope of the operation. What is the sales volume or budget? How many employees are there by various groupings? What is the net asset base? Compare figures to other benchmarks to aid in understanding the meanings of the numbers. How does this relate to you?

Locations: Where is the home office? How large is it? How important is it relative to other locations? Where are the branches and/or plants? How many are there? Is it important to work in several locations? Try to cover all of these points if the information is pertinent and applicable.

Financial Outlook: Investment services provide forecasts of sales and earnings, growth. Look at the various reports. Consolidate their basic recommendations if applicable. If the employer is not a business, try to obtain information on budgets and future and current sources of funding.

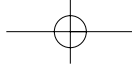
Recent News: Summarize any pertinent articles that have been published in newspapers and magazines within the past 18 months. News gives some important ideas on future direction.

Contacts: Give the names and titles of important chief operating officers. Try to learn the names of people who would be superior to you if you obtained a job. If you are applying for general programs or broad training positions, identify the key personnel person who you should contact. If you know the title but not the person, call a secretary for that information.

Positions Available: You probably have a good idea of the job that you want in the organization. Give the title and a brief description of the job.

Do you have a "resume" on your potential employers?

Figure 19.1



Job Description

Create your potential job description!

Title: Make a one- or two-word descriptor, preferably the words used by the employer.

Duties: Describe the day-to-day work activities. Try to hypothesize what a typical work day would be like. Be specific and spell out every single task that is likely to be requested of you.

Responsibilities: How many people might you supervise? What magnitude of dollar responsibility will be on your shoulders? To what position will you report? How closely will you be supervised? Will your decisions impact greatly on the employer's finances and/or image?

Qualifications: Determine the specific skills and background the employer is seeking. What is needed to do a superior job? Discuss the education level and specific formal training required in detailed course work. Get down to the very basic things that create the skills that are necessary to do the job.

Cover the level of work experience required to do a superior, not just an average, job. Keep thinking about how your background fits into this.

If applicable, try to describe some of the personal qualities the employer might be seeking. What personality traits, values, interests, etc., might be very useful in doing a superior job. How do your competencies compare?

Advancement: You have identified the initial job for which you feel you are qualified. The employer will be observing you for growth as well. If all goes well, what will your next three assignments be? Try to think of how you are qualified for these as well, because the employer may be way ahead of you.

What is the time between promotions? What type of training is offered to get you ready? Are you interested in doing the work and study it takes for the next job? Describe some lateral moves as well as upward moves. Keep thinking of what the employer is looking for so you can plan your strategy in your interview presentation. What is your potential in this job?

You now have a good feel for the employer and a better indication of the job. With that much information going into an interview, you are well on your way toward getting the offer. Your next step is to prepare a presentation that integrates what you know about the employer, the position, and your background. The perfect match is then in the making.

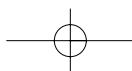
Location: Indicate the location of the current job. Where would the next three promotions take you? Would you have to move? Would you be willing to move? Describe all of the potential possibilities. Indicate your willingness to make those moves even if it means several geographic moves.

Compensation: Try to get some handle on the compensation for the job. Is the range reasonable? Could you live on that salary? How fast is salary likely to increase? Is compensation tied to production, bonus, or commission? Identify the type of compensation and how it might change over time. Does the employer seek only highly motivated people? Will money compensation be low? Is that important? What about lifestyle implications?

Resources: www.careeronestop.org, www.wetfeet.com, and other career oriented websites.

Would you be happy with this job for a while?

Figure 19.2





Presentation

If you break an interview down into its basic elements, you will find yourself doing four basic things:

- Preparation
- Presentation
- Execution
- Evaluation

The presentation leaves the most memorable impression in the employer's mind. Why will you be singled out among all the candidates interviewed to receive a job offer? Your presentation has much to do with getting you a job offer.

A previous action project dealt with preparation: getting the facts. This project deals with presenting the facts.

Will your presentation be organized, logical, and convincing? An interview is like a sales presentation. You are packaging the truth.

An interview presentation is similar to a speech. Good speeches are not off-the-cuff comments; they are usually carefully rehearsed. Everyone has heard too many dull speeches. Good speeches require planning. What will you say? How will you say it? Interviews require outlines and rehearsals.

An interview has an audience of one. This "speech" before one person could not be more critical to you. This project asks you to assume a very confident role; one that borders on being cocky.

Presentation Interview Action Project

Tell me about yourself.

Prepare a 20-minute monologue presentation. Use the scenario below as a guide.

Situation. You have been asked to give a speech about yourself.

You have assembled the top five decision-makers of the organization for which you want to work. The opening scenario follows.

Introduction. "I know that your organization is seeking top talent to fill positions for which I am very well qualified. I believe that I am among the best qualified people you will see.

"I know you are wondering why I called the five top executives of your organization together today. I appreciate your coming and bringing along with you some of your close associates. This is an important event in my life. I hope it turns into a productive twenty minutes for you. I want a job in your organization.

The Videotape Interview Coach

Do You Have a Career Coach?

Every interview presentation can be improved. The single most effective method of improving any presentation is to review it via the medium of videotape. Instead of critiquing yourself, a stronger approach is to involve another person in the critique, preferably a career counselor.

- Step 1:** Practice your responses to common questions before taping.
- Step 2:** Present your responses in front of a video camera.
- Step 3:** Review your complete presentation without interruption.
- Step 4:** Critique your responses one question at a time.
- Step 5:** Prepare a videotape report card. Evaluate yourself on the following criteria:

- Length of response
- Quality of answer
- Nonverbal communication

Try to be very critical of yourself but recognize that everyone needs a coach. Coaches should not be kind and polite. You need the criticism, and recommendations, if you expect to improve significantly.

The second videotaping will most likely show a much higher level of self-confidence, stronger motivational qualities, and a true excitement in your voice.

The videotape critique is a superb coach.

Have you completed an "Evaluation Form" on yourself?

"I sent you my resume. That will save you valuable time because I will not try to repeat much of the resume information in my presentation so we can focus on my potential contribution.

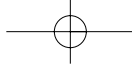
"You now know who I am, but I also want you to know why you should hire me. There are many excellent reasons why I can best help you. Let's look at them together. Let me start by telling you about the job in your organization which is perfect for me."

Do you have an outline that covers the content that supports your confidence? You need a plan for going into this monologue.

Presentation. Plan to continue this monologue with a twenty-minute presentation. Prepare a structured outline for the presentation and then write it. It should be roughly 40 to 50 paragraphs of four sentences each. When complete, it should be several pages in length, written with several basic, structured outlined points in mind.

Conclusion. At the end, thank the audience for their attention and deliver a forceful close. Ask for the position. Ask them for some commitment of a date when it would be reasonable for you to expect their decision.

Memorize this speech about you. Focus on the outline.



This project will be most effective if you can orally rehearse it. Make the presentation to a friend. Ask probing questions about how you can improve it. You should get responses that relate to content, style, organization, mannerisms, etc. Use these ideas to improve your performance. Ask your friend to watch for nonverbal communication.

If you do not have a critic available, video and audio tape your presentation as you give it in front of a mirror. Play it back. Critique yourself. Try completing an evaluation form on it yourself.

Obviously, you are not going to ever give such a presentation to a group of people. What you will do, however, is find yourself drawing on this presentation as you are asked questions in an interview.

Practice makes perfection and perfection is what you must strive for in a job interview. You can never have too much poise and polish. Keep practicing.

Questions

Prepare your answers in advance.

Your goal is to get an "invite" after every interview.

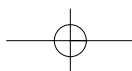
An interview is a series of questions. The questions are to you and about you. No one knows more about you than *you*. The questions are a given. Although there are thousands of potential questions, they can be grouped into some basic, common themes.

It is not difficult to guess what the questions are likely to be. If you know the questions, how can you not be able to give the right answers?

Answers are important, and you can plan them in advance. If you expect to achieve any degree of future success, the answers must be honest. That does not mean they have to come off the top of your head without forethought. Plan ahead.

There are several interview strategies to consider. One is to tell the employer only what you want the interviewer to hear. Another is to tell the employer what you think the interviewer wants to hear. Yet another is to tell only enough so that you get the job.

Some people are experts at second-guessing employers. They are experts at interviewing and get an offer every time. You want to learn to be both an expert interviewee and an expert interviewer.





The essence of this project is to find out what employers want. What are their needs? Can you honestly help? Can you produce on the job? If you can deliver, you are the right person. Further interviewing on your part and further interviewing on the employer's part are a waste of time to both of you if there is not a reasonable match in terms of expectations. Get together.

The essence of career planning is to set a goal and go after it. Your exploring is over, so the interview is not shopping around; it is the real thing.

If you are convinced that you are a match, your goal is to convince the employer of the match.

You know what the interview questions are likely to be. You know them because you have done extensive work on developing the highest possible self-awareness, career awareness, and employer awareness.

You know the employer, the employer's job, and yourself. You know that all the pieces fit together. The only remaining objective is to convince the employer.

You need to write a plan for telling employers what they want to hear and what you want them to hear in a convincing, logical pattern. Your strategy is to maintain a high level of control over the interview.

Interview questions can be grouped into six basic classifications. If the employer gets the right answers in these six categories, the decision is nearly won. The six areas are:

- Goals
- Education
- Experience
- Interests
- Skills
- Attitude

Nearly every probing question an employer asks is related to one of these six areas. Knowing this, it is not too difficult to anticipate what the questions are likely to be.

This interview presentation technique first anticipates what the questions will be. You next prepare reasoned, logical responses to all of the basic questions. The third step is to write out the responses and study them.

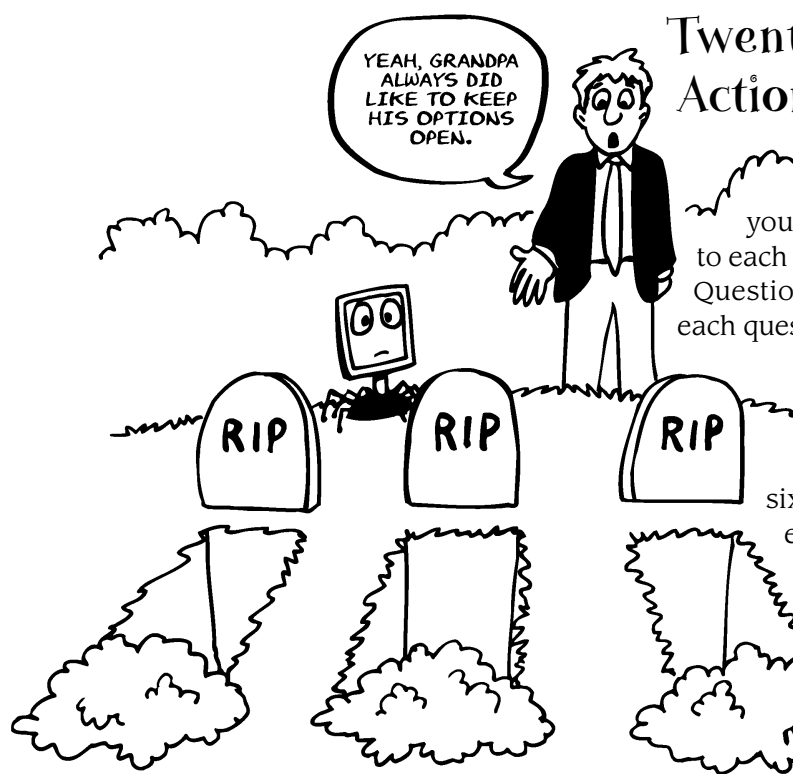
Are your responses honest? Do your responses sound canned? How can you best make them sound candid instead of canned? Effective, planned responses are far preferable to the off-the-cuff comments.

It is much easier to eliminate the "canned" and "rote memory" sound than it is to think of effective responses on your feet without a plan.

In essence, you are developing a presentation. You would never make an unprepared presentation to your boss. You should not think of making an impromptu presentation *now*, either. You are addressing your future boss. You have time to prepare your presentation.

Your job is at stake. You must make every interview count. Interviews are hard to get. When you have a receptive audience, it is critical that you prepare your presentation in advance. Each and every interview is an extremely valuable asset.

Your objective is to anticipate the interviewer's questions and to respond with prepared answers.



Twenty Questions Interview Action Project

Prepare a set of ten questions that you feel an employer is most likely to ask you and give a brief, but convincing, reply to each question. Use the illustration of "Twenty Questions" (Figure 17.8) as a guide, but make each question more personal to your situation.

You might wish to review the stress interview questions (Figures 17.9 and 17.10) for additional question ideas.

Select two questions from each of the six basic categories of goals, education, experience, interests, skills, and attitudes.

You should prepare for each question a one to three minute response. Limit each to at least, but not more than, three minutes, the typical response time.

You may prefer to print each question and its reply on a separate cue card, which could serve as an excellent review prior to each interview.

These websites have excellent interview advice.

www.vault.com
www.wetfeet.com
www.careermag.com
www.quintcareer.com
www.jobweb.com

www.studentjournal.com
www.monstertrak.com
www.collegejobboard.com
www.campuscareercenter.com
www.ajb.dni.us

Questions on Goals Interview Action Project

An employer uses questions relating to your goals to evaluate your ability to plan ahead and make decisions. Your goals indicate your level of maturity. How responsible are you?

If you can plan your own life in an objective manner, there is some indication that you can approach high-level assignments with confidence and decisiveness. Ill-defined goals imply "wishy-washiness."

Employers are looking at what you can immediately contribute to the organization. Do you have skills that will help solve particular problems they are facing right now? Do you have immediately usable job skills? Do you have the potential to advance? Are your goals too short-term, or are your long-range goals simply too vague or unrealistic to be meaningful? Your answers can make or break your interview success.

Short-term Plans. Employers often use an indirect line of questioning to evaluate your answers. Questions run like this: What position are you seeking? Why do you think you are the best candidate? What are your immediate



work goals? What makes you think that you will achieve your short-term goals? What tasks would you really like to do on your first job?

Describe some of the work activities that you would be best at in your first job after college. Give an in-depth analysis of what you know about the job and how your background fits it.

Long-term Plans. In getting at your ability to plan, an employer will start probing into how well you have thought through your own long-term ambitions.

The line of questioning might run something like this: Where do you want to be in five or ten years? Why do you think that you have the potential to get there? Why do you feel that you would be successful? Describe an ideal upward mobility career path with some realistic timetables on each intermediate work assignment.

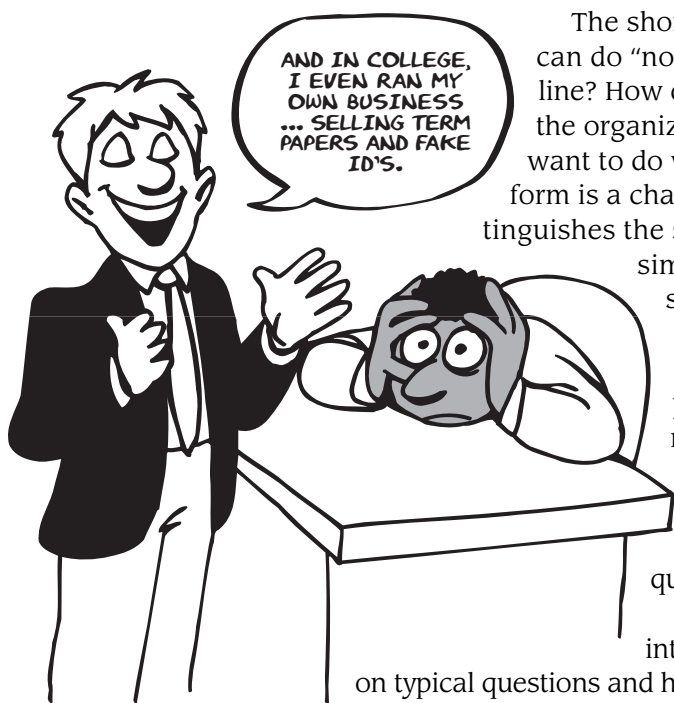
A few employers will quiz you on the thoroughness of your planning: How long have your goals been so well-developed? What types of lateral moves do you feel would be beneficial learning experiences that would help you in achieving your long-term goals? How would this current opening fit into your long-term plans?

The questions on goals may make you uncomfortable. Hundreds of things could later change your plans. You may feel it is unrealistic to plan your life that far into the future. Many people miss the point of this line of questions. No one is going to come back in five or ten years and accuse you of not sticking to your game plan.

This line of questioning probes into the way you approach specific objectives. It gets at factors in your makeup that are quite revealing.

Your approach to planning and organizing can be observed in real-life situations. These are extremely important variables to analyze. How do you describe your ambitions without appearing to be ego-centered?





The short-term questions relate specifically to what you can do “now.” What will immediately influence the bottom line? How quick can you produce results? Will you stay with the organization? How fast can you advance? Do you really want to do what you say you do? The employer’s evaluation form is a challenge to complete but goals often are what distinguishes the successful applicant. Often, all candidates have similar credentials. Who is superior? Why? Goal statements matter!

This goal-directed line of questioning may be the most important set of questions from the employer’s viewpoint. Be prepared to thoroughly respond. Realize that your replies are a test of your “reasoning ability,” not a long-term commitment.

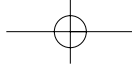
Summary. Prepare a set of ten goal-related questions and give a brief reply to each question.

Review the goal evaluation section of several interview evaluation forms. These will give you ideas on typical questions and how your answers will be evaluated.

Review the “Twenty Questions” in Figure 17.8. Then review the “Stress Interview Questions” in Figure 17.10. Identify the “goal-oriented” questions. Select your questions from these examples and modify them to fit your empathic expectations. Base your questions on your specific career objectives.

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your verbal answer about two to four minutes long when recited. Limit your paragraphs to four or five sentences. It would be a good idea to prepare an outline on note cards for interview review purposes.





Education Questions Interview Action Project

The obvious reason employers ask questions about your educational background is to evaluate your level of skills and competencies for the job description. Do not forget that they are looking beyond the immediate job description in some training positions.

Employers are often evaluating you for jobs several levels above the current job. Their line of questioning reflects that fact.

Most resumes give the basics on your education. Employers must expand on that limited data. They use sophisticated probing methods. They try to analyze your interest in learning. Change is constant. Past learning success is the best indicator of future learning.

Probing questions focus on your motivations by asking, "Why?"

Their probing reveals your basic level of competence. Do you desire to excel? Can you plan, organize, manage, and evaluate others? Probing questions on education require very thoughtful responses.

Why did you choose your subject area? What subjects did you like best? Why? Least? Why? What did you learn from extracurricular activities related to your studies?

How would you plan your academic studies differently if you could do so? Why? Why did you select your educational institution? Do you have plans for continuing your studies? Why? Where? When?

Are your grades a good indication of your abilities? Why or why not? What major study difficulties have you encountered and how did you cope with them?

There are literally hundreds of questions that you could be asked about your education and extracurricular activities. Your answers are revealing.

Review the questions above. Each question could be answered several different ways. These answers tell different things about your ability and interest in learning. Give a studied response. Your answers reveal motivation traits.

Summary. Prepare three education-related questions and give a brief reply to each question. Expand on your resume; do not indirectly simply repeat it. Discuss rationales for your decisions. Focus on "why," not just "what," you studied.

The "Interview Evaluation Forms" used by interviewers give you clues on how they will evaluate your responses. Review the many forms shown in Chapter 18. What words would an interviewer use to expand to the items shown on your resume when discussed with a selection committee?

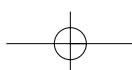
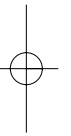
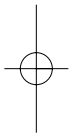
The "Twenty Questions" and "Stress Interview Questions" highlighted in Chapter 17 give you possible education-related questions. Read and select those questions related to your education.

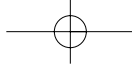
Remember, you want to expand the educational background. Don't repeat what is already on your resume. Elaborate based upon the job description.

How do the ten education questions relate to your specific competencies required in the job description? Analyze the relevant parts of your education as they relate to the job. Use stories to describe your desire to learn and excel. Discuss what you learned and why you will succeed in future learning environments.

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your answers about two to four minutes when recited. Limit your paragraphs to five sentences.

Prepare an outline on note cards for interview review purposes.





Work Experience Questions Interview Action Project

Your resume documents your prior work experience. Dates, job titles, duties, responsibilities, achievements, recognitions, scope, progression, and so forth are all clearly described.

Accomplishments. Most interviews focus most of your precious interview minutes on your past work experience. Your resume inadequately describes your work history and accomplishments. More than half of your time is spent discussing your past work achievements. Most of your competencies were built from your work. What will you say about your past? Don't repeat what the interviewer can read!

What more could an employer want? Plenty. The brief resume sketch indicates just *some* of your competencies. An employer is going to probe into your work values, communication abilities, leadership, management abilities, people skills, personality, etc. These are most important in any work setting.

Work experience questions usually go beyond what you have done or can do. An employer is trying to forecast what you *will* do. By emphasizing achievements and recognitions you offer proof of your motivations. What has motivated you in the past is what will motivate you in the future.

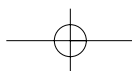
Skills. Some of the skills you have used in past jobs will be consistent with those in the new job. You may never have done some of the tasks required on the new job. Are you capable of doing them? Certain questioning techniques focus on selected work-related variables. An employer can only then judge whether you *can* and *will* do the job. Employers do not want a recapitulation of your resume.

The questions appear straightforward. You must consider how your answers will be "interpreted." Planned responses can greatly influence the opinions drawn by the employer. Just consider all of the different ways you could answer the following questions, which are quite common in interviews.

Management. What supervisory roles have you held? Did you enjoy supervising others? What did your peers and subordinates think of your competencies? Which full-time (part-time or summer) jobs have been most interesting? Why? Why are you changing jobs or careers? Describe the attitude of your last three supervisors toward you. Describe the results of your last performance review.

What has been your greatest or most significant work achievement? Describe what you actually did on your last job. Give me a typical day in your last job. What type of training did you receive on your last job? Identify the specific work skills you acquired from your previous work experiences. How do your past jobs relate to this new job? What would you do differently?

What were your personal objectives in your most recent jobs? May I contact your past superiors for work references? Give me an example of where you took a leadership role. Why did you quit each of your last jobs? What type of ratings did you receive in your reviews?





Questions. The “Stress Interview Questions” in Chapter 17 offer other excellent questions regarding work experience. Several of the “Twenty Questions” in that chapter focused on your work history.

Consider all of the specific responses you could give with very accurate and factual replies. As you analyze your possible replies, do you see your interviewer giving positive feedback to other selection decision-makers that set you ahead of your competition for this job?

A reasoned and prepared response greatly influences the impression you leave. What you learned is more important than what you did. Your situational stories are extremely valuable in the assessment of you.

Summary. Prepare three work experience questions. Give a brief reply to each question. Discuss how your seemingly unrelated work experience has taught you things that are directly

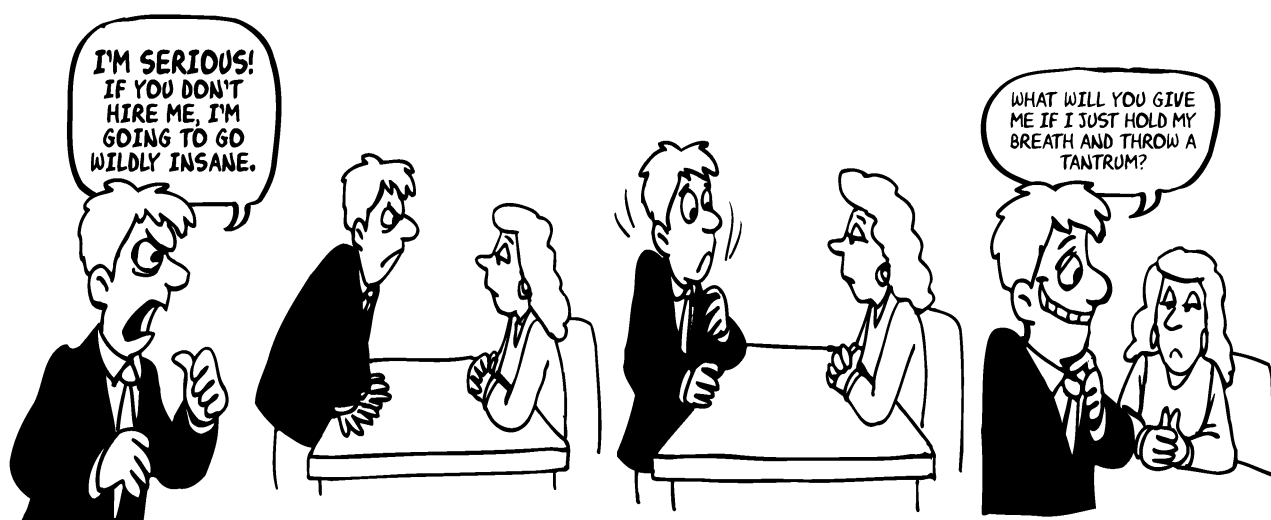
related to the job being sought. What is the evaluation write-up on you going to show? What do you want it to reveal? Use the STAR Technique to respond to your anticipated questions.

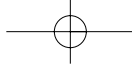
Use the “Twenty Questions” and “Stress Questions” in Chapter 17 as a guide in writing your anticipated questions. Which prior situations will you use to prepare an organized response to each of the ten anticipated questions?

Use some empathy. If you were the interviewer, which probing questions are most likely to generate responses that you can use in writing your “interview evaluation.” Which situations are most likely to get truthful answers that reveal the capabilities of this person? What motivates you to perform in a superior manner? How do you describe your talents and results?

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your ten answers about two to four minutes. Limit your answers to four minutes!

Prepare your responses on note cards for interview review purposes.





Values Questions Interview Action Project

Some questions take more of a philosophical bend. What do you consider your greatest strengths? What has been the most important turning point in your life? This line of questioning is designed to reveal your commitments to beliefs that you consider most important in your life. What event in your life was the most satisfying to you? The most disappointing? Why? What are your personal five-year goals?

What do you really want out of life? What is your philosophy of life? What makes you work hard? Identify the five things that motivate you most. What do you expect to be earning in five years? Tell me about yourself.

The last question is the most frequently asked question in an interview. The others are occasionally asked but not as frequently. Nonetheless, if they are asked, you should be prepared for them. You can see how an off-the-cuff response to any of them can easily kill your employment chances.

The "Stress Interview Questions" and the "Twenty Questions" in Chapter 17 will give you some excellent ideas on how professional interviewers might phrase questions related to your personal values.

The responses to these questions quickly reveal your values and ingrained attitudes to some of the deep-rooted, most important aspects of your life. What message about your values do you want to leave?

Summary. Prepare these questions on values and give a brief reply to each question. Make sure that your answers reveal that you are a strongly motivated, hard working, committed to excellence type of potential employee. Your motivations and maturity indicators should all be revealed and proven by your past deeds.

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your answers about two to four minutes when read.

Prepare these questions and answers on note cards for interview review purposes.

Interest Questions Interview Action Project

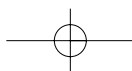
Questions relating to values, interests, and personality often run together. It is nearly impossible to identify what a skilled interviewer is after in a given line of inquiry.

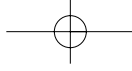
Although his or her specific motive may not be clear, the interviewer's goal is to get you talking about yourself.

When you are talking, the employer is learning and evaluating. He or she is learning about your ability to communicate, convince, sell, and work with others.

Your values, interests, and personality are coming out. What makes you tick? A host of factors are being evaluated by some seemingly simple and innocent questions. The questions are unimportant. It is your answers that are revealing.

Questions many times are about your activities outside of education and former work settings. Many of your skills and abilities to do a job come from your outside activities and interests. The questions might include the following:





How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies? Are you interested in any sports? Do you have an avocation? What is the extent of your involvement in civic or professional groups? What leaderships have you held outside of education and work? Tell me a little about your background outside of schooling and work experiences. In what type of setting do you feel most comfortable?

Another line of questioning might relate to what you know about the employer. In most cases, the interviewer is trying to assess the sincerity of your interest and your potential commitment to the organization. Questions to reflect these things sound like this: What do you know about our organization? Why do you think you would fit in with our people? What have you heard about our training programs? Are you willing to travel? How do you feel about being relocated every three to five years? Are you seeking employment in an organization of a certain size? Why would you like to work for us?

You appear to be overqualified for us; why do you still want this position? What can you do for us now? How can we help you further your goals? What geographical areas most appeal to you? Do you know any of our employees? What kind of information did you find out about us before this interview?

All of these questions get at the heart of your interests.

Summary. Prepare three questions on interests and give a brief reply to each question. Your answers should show your areas of interests outside of your education and work settings. Show how these interests are relevant to the position being sought or how they have contributed to your development.

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your answers about two to four minutes.

Prepare your questions and answers on note cards for interview review purposes.

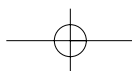
Personality Questions Interview Action Project

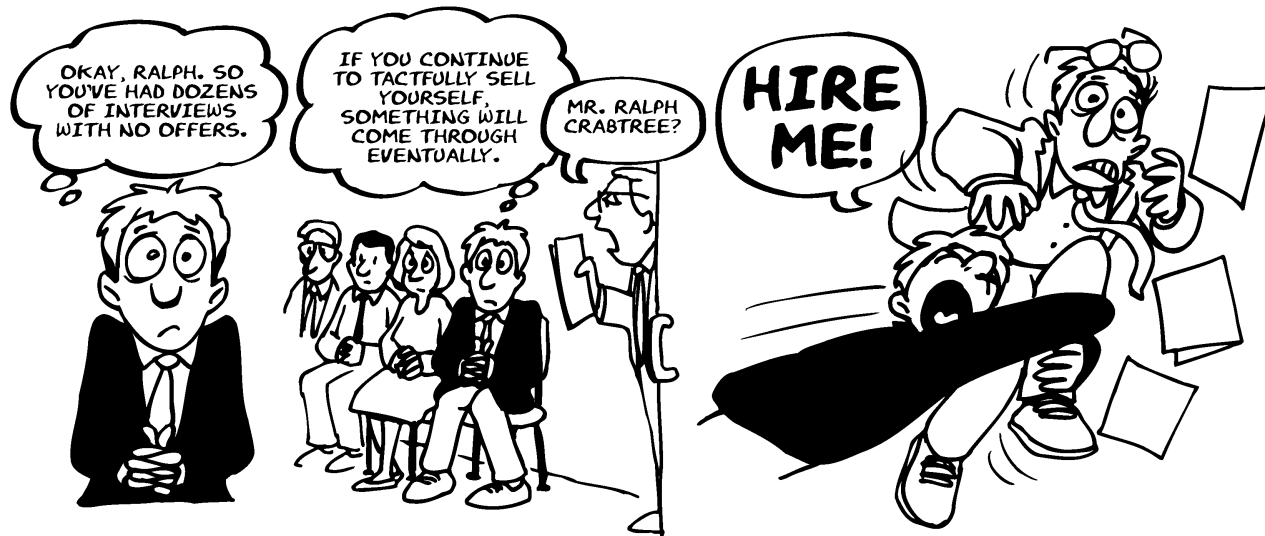
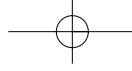
Personality plays a major role in selection because it greatly influences job performance. Different jobs demand different personality styles.

Regardless of the type of questions asked, personal qualities are being evaluated. Will you fit in with the group? Some questions get at that evaluation more directly than others. Some favorite questions are the following:

How did you get along with your last boss? Did your teachers respond positively to your questions and answers in the classroom? Do you tend to be the talker in most small groups you are in? How was your classroom participation? Give me a humorous episode in your life. To what positions, if any, have you been elected by your peers? Give me an example of a stress situation and how you reacted to it. Describe your personality. Are you a team player or a group leader? Do you consider yourself an aggressive, take-charge, type of person?

Personality-type questions usually fit conveniently into the flow of the conversation. There is rarely a planned pattern of questions that follow a specific scheme, but in a roundabout way most of the questions get asked and/or answers are given.





By anticipating all the likely occurrences of personality questions, you can be ready with a proper response. This anticipating strategy puts *you* in control of the interview.

Many of the “Stress Interview Questions” from Chapter 17 are designed to reveal certain aspects of your personal qualities. You might want to prepare responses to these questions.

Summary. Prepare three questions relative to personal qualities and give a brief reply to each question. Your replies should reveal your commitment to teamwork, ability to work with and for others, assertiveness level, and your approaches to communication with others.

Write each question on a separate sheet of paper. Make your answers about two to four minutes

Prepare your questions and answers on note cards for interview review purposes.

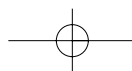
Empathic Evaluation Interview Action Project

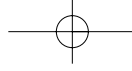
Immediately following an interview, all employers complete some type of formal written evaluation. They are usually on forms similar to the forms shown in Chapter 17. What would an evaluation form completed on you look like?

The single best way to find out the answer is to do some role playing. You and a friend could develop two hypothetical employers and interview each other. Using a video camera to record the interview would be a special benefit.

The videotaped role-play is a super method to use in critiquing and subsequently improving your interview performance. You will find that the second and third time you repeat the simulation, your interview performance will greatly improve.

Many professional outplacement firms and college career service offices regularly use this approach. Being in the role of the employer is just as beneficial as the role of applicant. You get an opportunity to get into the mind of the interviewer to see how and why to formulate specific questions.





Recruiter Terminology

Hi-po:	High potential recruit
Empty suit:	Looks good but can't deliver
Charger:	Makes things happen
GQ:	High fashion dresser
Cosmo:	Fashion model
Windmill:	Appearance of perpetual motion
Guru:	Mentor/expert
Rabbi:	Protector of others
Monk:	Completely work oriented
Air-head:	Not intellectual; dumb
Pretty Face:	Good looking but not street-smart
Hustler:	Achiever
Go-getter:	Assertive

Figure 19.3

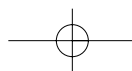
Another major asset is just getting a feel on how an employer reviews the interview events and then converts them to a written form. If you can anticipate the factors upon that you will be evaluated, you can direct the flow of the interview in the direction which will more positively shed light on your strongest attributes that the interviewer will be evaluating.

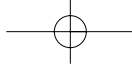
You do not need to role-play or videotape an interview to ascertain the most important factors that a recruiter will use in the evaluation. Most evaluation forms emphasize these factors:

- Career direction—goals
- Qualifications—educational skills, experience factors
- Communication abilities
- Personal attributes
- Job-related interests
- Responsibility
- Interview preparation
- Maturity and judgment
- Motivation

Evaluate yourself on these eight dimensions. You will get a sound impression of the interviewer's task. You will better know how to influence a favorable evaluation on each dimension.

Summary. Prepare a three- to five-page *interview evaluation* on yourself. Use as many evaluation forms as you can find to construct the characteristics upon which you feel an interviewer will evaluate you for the specific type of position that you are seeking. Use the examples in Chapter 18 as a guide.





Do not use a specific form *per se*. Which words do you write about yourself under each dimension being evaluated? Force yourself to draw upon all of these key words in your analysis.

Review the evaluation forms illustrated at the end of Chapter 18. These will give you an idea of the factors used by employers. Complete any one that evaluates one of your most recent interviews.

Pretend that you just finished an interview. It would be even better if you could use a recent real interview so you could draw upon your performance in that interview in writing the evaluation. After you finish the evaluation, ask yourself what you should have done differently to improve the quality of the evaluation.

You should identify at least eight factors that you feel a recruiter would use in your case. Put two characteristics on each page. Under each characteristic, write an evaluation for each factor. Use key word descriptors (see Figure 2.12) or in paragraph form, explain each evaluation. Evaluate your competencies for the job you want.

The Mock Interview Action Project

Perhaps the very best way to prepare for your interviews is to use the mock interview technique.

You will need a partner. This can be a career counselor, career coach, parent, faculty member, best friend, or anyone who is willing to assist you. Knowing you, even if only a little, will help. This must be someone who will give you negative feedback as well as positive feedback and who is willing to offer some constructive criticism.

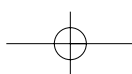
It helps if you can select a partner who is going to be conducting a similar job search process at about the same time. In career workshops, career classes, job clubs, one-on-one career coaching sessions, it is common to find a willing partner involved in this group learning experience.

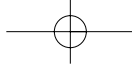
This project is like a final examination. Nearly all items that it requires of you have been already completed, which makes most of this just an assembly of previous work. Some would call this your “personal portfolio” but unfortunately that term has another meaning.

Items to Exchange. In a mock interview, each party must start with as much information about each other as possible. The interviewer must have the following items to ensure it is a reasonable fit before an interview is to happen.

- Resume and cover letter/e-mail
- Complete job advertisement/job description

You will need to prepare all the materials that your mock recruiter will need to conduct this interview. Normally, the recruiter must write the job description. When the opening occurs, an advertisement is usually placed on the Web, or in other sources, which candidates can review. You may have to prepare this ad for your partner or give them a printed copy that you obtained from an advertising resource. The details in the job description will serve in your mock interview as a detailed description of the duties, task, and the qualifications and competencies required to do a superior job.





You need to identify both the potential employer and the job based upon your interest and qualifications. You are welcome to identify any employer who, based upon a job search, has an opening for you. If you can make this a current job opening for which you are qualified, your mock interview can be greatly enhanced. Otherwise, you will have to develop a hypothetical job opening.

Given this employer, you need to prepare two documents neither of which should be more than three pages long.

- Employer profile (see Figure 19.1)
- Job description (see Figure 19.2)

Following these suggested formats, you need to visit the websites of your designated employer and similar employers, job boards, wetfeet.com, vault.com, and www.careeronestop.org and collect as much objective information that you can on the employer and the job opening. For best results it should be a real job opening that you have found in your research but if the market is soft and a current opening cannot be found, you should use a hypothetical job description.

Thoroughly complete these two documents and share them with your partner. Do not discuss them initially. Your partner will need to read these in order to formulate potential questions to ask you. You will also need to provide your partner with the typical information that you would have normally provided to an employer such as the following.

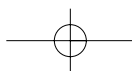
- Cover letter (see Figures 13.6 and 13.7 plus samples)
- Resume (see Chapter 12 for examples)

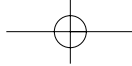
Interview Method. You should anticipate that this will be a behavioral-based interview. This means that, based upon the competencies required for the job, you must prepare a series of BBI stories that illustrate your competencies based upon your past behaviors. Given the job description and competencies required, write at least six questions that you would ask if you were the interviewer.

Using materials covered in the chapters on interviewing, base your anticipated questions on your resume and the job description. Focus your questions on “will do” qualities like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking skills, decision-making abilities, communication skills, maturity, and other factors in the job requirements where you can use your VIPS in your reply.

Make your anticipated questions open ended. Use the questions in the interview chapters as guides. Make your questions specific to the job and resume. By carefully constructing your questions to specific activities in your past, you are “coaching” the recruiter as to the reason behind the questions so any follow-up probing questions can be easily improvised by your partner. Without follow-up probing questions, you will just “memorize” a reply that does not help you. Submit these questions to your recruiter partner.

- Education-oriented questions
- Work-experience oriented questions
- Activity-based questions





Anticipated Questions. Save a copy of your anticipated questions. On your copy, you should make three to five bullet points with your best response. This is your cheat sheet. As you write your one sentence bullet point reminders, remember the keywords and think of past experiences where that quality was demonstrated.

Your sentences should describe the situation that you plan to use to illustrate several different competencies that you possess that relate to the job description. At the end of your bullet pointed sentence, identify the two to four competencies that this situation is designed to illustrate.

What are the stories, based upon your past, that you will use to indirectly answer each of the six questions that you submitted?

Your partner should be able to see only the questions that you submitted. Only you know the situations that you are going to use that will illustrate the competencies that you know are important in the job. Your objective is to convince your partner that you have those competencies by illustrating them in the situations that you use to answer each question. For each of your six questions you will need to have at least three situations that you can use in your anticipated answers.

At the end of your interview you will need to submit these anticipated answers to your partner after he or she has completed an evaluation form. Put this in writing and memorize it. You cannot use it openly within the mock interview time.

Anticipate answers to expected questions.

STAR Technique. Before you start your interview, plan to get your points across by using the STAR technique:

- What is your situation?
- What task needed to be accomplished?
- What actions did you take?
- What were the results?

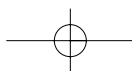
Evaluations. When your recruiter/partner finishes the interview, an evaluation form needs to be completed immediately. Preferably, you'll use one of the forms from Chapter 18, but if you feel that a special form would be more appropriate, you should design a unique form for your recruiter/partner to complete.

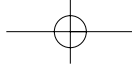
Before you see your partner's evaluation form, you need to use empathy and complete the form on yourself with an estimation of what you feel that your partner will write. Encourage your partner to write comments, not just check the boxes so you can make this project as realistic as possible.

Conduct the mock interview.

After your thirty minute mock interview, take about ten to fifteen minutes each to write the evaluations. Then share these with each other.

- Job description
- Cover letter
- Resume
- Anticipated questions
- Anticipated answers
- Your empathetic evaluation form completed
- Mock recruiters evaluation form completed





Critique. Review all seven of the documents together with your partner. Discuss your feelings first. Explain what you are trying to accomplish. Allow your partner to explain the completed evaluation form. Do both of you feel that your interview responses supported why you are the best candidate for this particular job?

Discuss your feelings with your partner. Encourage your partner to give you constructive criticism. Where do you disagree significantly? What advice did you take away from this experience that you will use in your next interview?

Summary. Experience has shown this exercise to be extremely valuable to you. An enhancement to this project is to reverse roles with your partner if he or she is also in the job market.

This role-playing exercise often proves to be one of your most successful interview learning techniques. The more mock interviews that you conduct, the higher your retention of the information that you want to share.

One additional enhancement to this mock interview is the addition of a videotape that can be played back and critiqued together. When that is not possible, audiotape your plan presentation in front of a mirror to add to your learning.

You will discover that the mock interview project will be a fruitful learning experience. Taken with other action-oriented projects, these exercises will move you much closer to a successful career planning strategy implementation.



Summary

Job interviewing is an extremely important part of the career planning process. You should make great efforts just to obtain your interviews. The dollar value of an interview is very high depending upon your location and area of concern.

You use many contacts to obtain your interviews. Therefore, you must make every interview count. You cannot afford to leave success to chance.

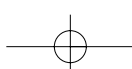
Successful interviewing requires preparation. Many different approaches, strategies, and techniques can improve your performance. By carefully selecting the most valid and reliable strategies for your situation, you can greatly improve your interviewing success.

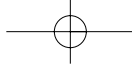
Preparation is the most important factor in interviewing success. A planned and well-executed presentation that draws upon specific content enhances your interview chances for success.

Knowing what factors the interviewer will use in evaluating your responses allows you the opportunity to carefully move your responses toward the most positive directions.

Simulation can never fully replicate a real interview, but practicing projects greatly improve your eventual performance. Projects build your level of confidence by eliminating much of the uncertainty about what to expect.

Anticipating what to expect makes your real interview performance much more cohesive. You come across as a person who plans ahead and executes according to an objective set of steps. You are far less likely to “freeze” in pressure situations.





Writing out your plans forces you to cover all aspects thoroughly. A re-reading not only rehearses the presentation but it allows you to better observe areas needing improvement.

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Many recruiters are trained each year by the HR consulting firm called Development Dimension International. This firm is one of the most reputable consulting firms in the assessment field. Reviewing this website will give you a better understanding of why the techniques covered in this chapter really work well.

