PREPARING for an INTERVIEW

A successful interview will be the result of prior preparation and practice. Below are some points to consider as you prepare to sell your strengths and experiences.

KNOW YOURSELF
  » Analyze your interests, skills, accomplishments, values, and passions.
  » Identify examples of success from your past experiences.
  » You should be able to tell short stories that explain problems or situations you encountered, the action you took to solve those problems, and the results of your actions.
  » Present these scenarios by focusing on the skills, abilities, and personal traits that allowed you to achieve your successes.
  » Try to make your scenarios relevant to the job for which you are applying. If possible, quantify your achievements.

IDENTIFY TWO or THREE THEMES
  » A theme could be an example of your strong leadership experience, your role in a meaningful community service project, or direct experience in your field of interest.
  » Determine how you will convey these points during the interview using the CAR method (See page 26 for an example).

RESEARCH the ORGANIZATION prior to the INTERVIEW
  » If it is expected that candidates perform research on the organization or institution.
  » Up-to-date information can usually be found online.
  » Key facts to gather before interviewing could include:
    - Products, services, or programs
    - Mission and vision statements
    - Core values
    - Size
    - Locations other than your community
    - Organizational structure
    - Latest trends

ACQUIRE as MUCH INFORMATION as POSSIBLE
  » What skills are required? What are the responsibilities?
  » You may find it helpful to conduct an informational interview with someone who is currently working in a position similar to the one to which you aspire.
  » Searching LinkedIn may provide you with several alumni and employer contacts that are willing to help.

REMEMBER THAT the INTERVIEW is a TWO-WAY EXCHANGE of INFORMATION
  » Your goal is to discover if the organization or institution is a good fit for you.
  » The goal of the interviewer is to assess whether you are a good fit for them.
  » Be sure to prepare questions to ask at the end of the interview.

PRACTICE YOUR INTERVIEWING SKILLS
  » Practice your answers to several interview questions out loud. Find a friend to ask questions and help you prepare. It is recommended you keep your answers between one and two minutes long.
  » A practice or “mock” interview is strongly suggested to continually strengthen your interview skills. In a one-on-one setting with a qualified career advisor, your performance will be critiqued and you will receive immediate suggestions for improvement. Questions will be tailored to the position or program of interest.
  » To request a practice interview, contact the ICS office at 317-940-9383 or ics@butler.edu.
TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS and TRICKY SCENARIOS

TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Tell me about yourself.

This is one of the most common interview questions and also one of the most difficult to answer. It is important that you share the proper information with the employer. This is typically the first question of the interview, so it is your chance to make a great first impression. Refrain from providing personal information and instead start selling your skills right from the start.

To help construct your answer, start by reviewing the job description and pick out two or three of the skills that the employer is looking for that you also possess. Then, provide brief yet convincing examples from your past that prove that you have the skills they are looking for in a candidate.

A formula used by Kathryn Minshew, CEO & Founder of The Muse, is called the Present-Past-Future formula. Start with the present—where you are right now. Then, transition into the past—a little bit about the experiences you’ve had and the skills you gained at the previous position. Finally, end with the future—why you are really excited for this particular opportunity.

Example: “I’m currently a history major at Butler University and became passionate about this field when I was young as my father was a high school history teacher. I completed an internship last semester at the Indiana Historical Society where I was able to archive documents and artifacts and utilized Google Docs to more effectively organize my findings. The position utilized my attention to detail and strong passion for connecting our past to our present, and I also loved working with a team of people, which is why I’m extremely interested in the tour guide position for the Indiana War Memorials.”

What is your greatest weakness (or area for improvement)?

It is important not to respond with an answer that could cause concern or false assumption on the part of the interviewer as you want your response to be positive. Also, make sure your weakness does not relate to one of the major qualifications or requirements of the opportunity. Instead, state an area that you have already begun to improve upon. You may briefly state the weakness and then spend a majority of the time discussing the steps you have taken to address it and your plan going forward to ensure that it is resolved.

Example: “I love to be involved on campus but recently found myself getting over-involved in too many activities, and I wasn’t able to give 100 percent to all of them. I have started to be more selective in the activities that I become involved in, so I can dedicate more of my attention to the ones I am most passionate about. As a result of limiting my options to only those I’m most passionate about, I have been able to provide quality participation in my current activities while also giving 100 percent to my studies.”

What do you look for in a job?

When preparing an answer to this question, first think about what is important to you in a position. Then share the aspects that align with what the employer is looking for in a candidate. The motive behind this question is to see if what you are looking for in a position aligns with what they are looking for in a candidate. To help construct this answer, review the job description and the requirements that they list. This will give you a good starting point for finding those areas that are a match.

Why are you leaving your present position?

Never answer with negative reasons (e.g., I didn’t like my boss), even if it is true. Frame your answer positively by answering why you want to move to the target company instead of why you left or want to leave your most recent position. In your approach, be honest. You don’t want something to come up later in your references or a background check that may discredit you. For difficult situations, talk to your career advisor to construct a proper approach to this question.
Example: “I’m leaving my current position because I’m ready to take on new projects that better utilize my talents and interests. I also have limited opportunities for professional development, which I have heard is an important aspect for employees at your organization. And after speaking with some current employees, I’m very drawn to the company culture and team atmosphere, which I value highly!”

**Why should we hire you?**
Keep your response brief. Recap any job requirements the interviewer mentioned earlier in the interview; then, point by point, match your skills, abilities, and qualifications to those items. Relate a past experience which represents success in achieving objectives.

Example: “I think I am the ideal candidate because I have the organizational, communication, and creative skills you desire along with proven leadership and on-the-job experience.” Then recap them and state how each of these items align with the position.

**“STRESS” QUESTIONS**
In some cases, employers have been known to ask “stress” questions. The purpose is to catch you off guard and see how you react to an unexpected question or scenario. Typically, there are no right answers to these questions. The keys to successfully answering a “stress” question are to remain calm and justify why you chose your answer.

**Sample Stress Questions:**
- Why is a manhole cover round?
- If you could be a tree, what kind would you be?

**Sample Answers:**
- A manhole cover is round because a manhole is round. The cover fits perfectly and keeps people and cars safe from injury.
- If I could be a tree, I would be an apple tree because I would be able to create a product and share it with others.

**TRICKY SCENARIOS**
You may encounter some tricky situations during your interview process. Below are a few examples and advice to navigate those challenges.

**Sequential Interviews:** You may be asked to participate in a series of interviews ranging from one-on-ones to group sessions over the course of one or more days.
- Plan on repeating yourself. A lot. Although you may get tired of hearing your personal pitch, remember that this is likely to be the first impression for most of your interviewers.
- If there is a presentation request, make sure you get as many details as possible to help you prepare.
- Ask for an agenda/timeline ahead of time. You will want to know when you have scheduled breaks and if you will be interviewed during a meal.

**Multiple Interviews:** You are likely to encounter several rounds of interviews for a position spanning several weeks. These could range from an initial phone screening followed by Skype and/or in-person interviews.
- Consider each interview an opportunity to further highlight and develop your relevant skills and experience.
- Take advantage of subsequent interviews to ask additional questions related to the organizational culture.

**Panel Interviews:** It is not uncommon to find yourself seated across from a hiring committee or panel of three or more people. Although intimidating, this gives interviewers a chance to see how you fit into a group of people and saves time.
- Make eye contact with all of your interviewers rather than only focusing on the person who asked the question; use specific names when answering questions.
- Try to relax and remind yourself that this is a conversation.
- Request business cards before you leave in order to write personalized thank-you cards/emails.
QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

It is critical that you have questions prepared for your interviewer(s). This helps you learn more about the culture of an organization and provides the interviewer(s) with information about your values and interests based on the questions you ask.

Below are some examples.

- Can you describe the typical career path of a ______ in this department/organization.
- What professional development opportunities are available? How frequently?
- What issues or concerns are facing this department/organization?
- What are the goals for this department/organization for the near future?
- What new projects have this department/organization recently undertaken?
- Can you share some examples about why you enjoy working here?
- What direction do you see this organization going in the future?
- What is your relationship with the local community?
- Could you share a little bit about people who have been successful in this role? What were their strengths, qualities, etc.?
- What characteristics do you possess that have made you successful with this organization?
- What do you wish you had known about (Organization/Department/School/Program) before coming here?
- What makes (Organization/Department/School/Program) unique?
- Can you tell me where the interview process will go from here and share your anticipated timeline?*
- May I have your business card(s)?
- Unless brought up by the interviewer(s), it is advised not to ask about salary or benefits.

*These questions will provide you with a timeline/contact information for writing your thank yous.

ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you, the job candidate. An employer’s questions—whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process—must be related to the job you are seeking.

Examples of legal and illegal interview questions can be found in Appendix V.

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- **Examine** for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, if the interviewer asks, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?” you’ve been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Similarly, let’s say the interviewer asks, “Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?” You might answer, “I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires.”

- **Answer.** You are free to do so, if you wish. However, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that isn’t related to the job. In fact, you might be giving the “wrong” answer, which could harm your chances of receiving a job offer.

- **Refuse/Deflect.** This is well within your rights. You may consider saying, “I don’t think that question relates to the job or my abilities, so I’d be happy to answer a different question if that is okay.”

See Appendix V for a list of legal/illegal interview questions.