

DENISON
UNIVERSITY
CAREER SERVICES

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SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING TIPS

INTRODUCTION

The job interview is a crucial step in the hiring process. An employer uses the interview to help evaluate a potential employee's *job-related skills*, *work attitude*, and *general fit* with the organization. This forces the interview to focus primarily on the applicant, but the interviewing process should be a beneficial **exchange of information** between both parties. Your fit with the employer is as important as their fit with your *skills*, *career plans*, and *aspirations*. To present yourself in the most positive way, your interview should reflect:

- knowledge about yourself
- a thorough understanding of employer needs
- enthusiasm
- and a serious desire for the employment opportunity

With thoughtful preparation and practice you can learn the skills necessary to interview effectively.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

In order to prepare for any type of interview, you need to know yourself VERY well. The job search process begins with self - assessment. Consider your readiness to communicate who you are to an employer by identifying your: **strengths**, **weaknesses**, and **specific skills** you have developed through: **academic coursework**, **internship**, **work experience**, **volunteer work**, and/ or in **campus activities**. You may begin to organize your thoughts by: being very familiar with **your resume**, completing the **Campbell Interest and Skill Survey** (available in Career Services), and/or scheduling an **individual consultation** with a Career Services staff member. We have several online resources available www.denison.edu/career.

Ask yourself: What ideas do I have about my career plans? What are my long and short-term career plans?
What are my values and how do they factor in? What kind of work environment do I desire?
Am I willing to relocate? What skills do I want to use/develop in work?
What career areas interest me most?

Then, **practice** putting your thoughts into words by:

- having a friend ask you interview questions and provide feedback
- participating in a **practice interview** in Career Services (this is a 15-20 minute interview with feedback provided afterward).

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Additional preparation includes:

- Talking with people in that field/region, including alumni (contacts available through CareerNET, www.denison.edu/careernet)
- Researching employers in the field/the company interviewing you and identifying specific reasons why you want to work there. See Employer Research Handout.
- Mentally preparing specific examples of accomplishments that serve as good illustrations of your abilities.
- Organizing necessary items (such as several resumes, portfolio- sample of work, and interview attire).
- Spending some time thinking about questions that you plan to ask. You may want to make a list.
- Considering any nervous habits that you might have and do any relaxation techniques you find helpful.
- Review the interview time/location and make arrangements to arrive ten minutes before your appointment time.

The more prepared you are, the less nervous you will be and the more able to express your enthusiasm in the interview.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Greet the interviewer by name (Mr. or Ms.) in a friendly but professional manner. Do not address interviewers by their first name, unless you are asked by them to do so.
 - Introduce yourself in a firm, confident voice, shaking hands firmly as the interviewer extends his/her hand. Remain standing until offered a seat, then sit up straight and poised.
 - Be concise, specific, honest, and confident in responses that stress your most positive points.
 - If necessary, take time to reflect before answering a question and ask politely for clarification if needed.
 - Raise questions at appropriate times, demonstrating interest and enthusiasm about the position.
 - Be aware of your non-verbal behaviors (including eye contact, facial expressions, tone, rate, posture).
 - Avoid putting down/stereotyping yourself or others. Respect yourself and the recruiter to the fullest degree. Know the interviewer's name and the next steps in the interview/hiring process.
 - Thank the interviewer for the time and consideration he/she has given you.
 - Ask for a business card and clarify the next steps/timeline.
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AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Make notes** about what you have learned, your general impressions, and any

remaining questions you have. Also note your interview *strengths* and *weaknesses*.

- Write a formal **thank you letter** to the interviewer very soon, within 48 hours, after the interview. This letter should include: the interviewer's correct *name* and *job title*, *date* you had the interview and for what *position*, what you *liked* or *learned* from the interview about the position or company/what new information is *useful* to you, what you can *contribute* in this position, your *qualifications* for the position, *enthusiasm* for the position if it is of interest to you, and a *thank* you for the recruiter's time and consideration. If you are no longer interested, that should be conveyed out of consideration for the organization so their search may be continued.
- Be **patient**. Be aware that it usually takes an on-campus recruiter at least two weeks, probably more, to communicate a response. It is appropriate to follow-up with a phone call if you have not received some type of communication after a few weeks. However, make your phone calls brief and courteous, understanding that employers may be interviewing at additional schools and also taking care of other on-going business. Virtually all screening interviews are followed either by an invitation for additional interviews at the employer's office or by a rejection letter. Rarely will an on-campus interview be followed directly by a job offer.
- Be **persistent** in preparing for/participating in future interviews. Not all interviews result in job offers, but a rejection letter should not be interpreted as a reflection of your character and abilities. More often than not, such a letter means only that your qualifications are not those required or preferred for a particular position. If you think you are being rejected for any other reasons and/ or feel your interview style may be hindering your progress, make an appointment with Career Services. Assess outcomes realistically, keeping in mind that an *unsuccessful interview* may result from:
 - lack of career planning/
clarity of goals
 - little knowledge about the
field of specialization
 - lack of research on the
organization
 - lack of
interest/enthusiasm in
organization/position
 - inability to communicate
clearly
 - insufficient evidence of
achievement/initiative/
leadership
 - overbearing or
overaggressive behavior
 - lack of well-thought-out
questions about the job
 - lack of confidence or
poise

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Present and project a professional image!

BUSINESS ATTIRE

For Women:

- A suit, pant or skirt, in conservative colors (black, gray, navy, brown, beige, or burgundy)
- (Skirt length appropriate for sitting no more than 2" above the knee)
- Tailored blouse
- Closed-toe, low-heeled pump; hose (no white)
- Conservative jewelry

For Men:

- Conservative, well-fitting two-piece business suit (matching jacket and pants, not a sport coat)
 - Long-sleeved shirt. White or blue are recommended
 - Conservative tie
 - Leather oxford or loafer style shoe (shined); matching, dark dress socks
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BUSINESS CASUAL

For Women:

- A twin sweater set in neutral colors, cotton button-down shirts in solids and stripes, mix-and-match knit separates, wool turtlenecks, tailored blouse
- Skirt or slacks in a neutral color
- A tailored dress with sleeves or jacket
- Casual, low-heeled shoes or flats

For Men:

- Dress slacks, cotton khakis (pressed)
 - High-quality crew-neck or turtleneck sweaters
 - Long-sleeved sport shirts (tie is not necessary)
 - A blazer or sport coat, usually navy or black (optional)
 - Dress leather belt
 - Patterned or colored socks in a heavier knit than dress socks
 - Loafers or other shined shoes that bridge the gap between casual and dress
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FASHION FAUX PAS FOR INTERVIEWS

- Distracting clothing including busy patterns, bright colors, big stripes, or tank tops
- Earrings or ponytails on men. Nose rings and tongue rings
- Sport coat and khakis instead of a two-piece suit
- Tennis shoes, sandals, or any open-toe shoes
- Size extremes-ultra baggy pants and/or too small and cropped shirts; Too short skirts
- Strong perfume, cologne or after shaves
- Clunky, heavy, thick-soled shoes for women