

Interviewing Techniques

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Introduction to Interviewing

Giving some thought to an upcoming interview and thoroughly preparing for it often means the difference between success and failure in your job search endeavors. The resources available at BBA Career Services provide much of the information, advice, and direction you will need for your interview preparation. You should attend interviewing workshops as well as schedule a mock interview with a BBA Career Advisor. Researching a company is also a highly important component to any interview. The BBA Career Services office (CBA 2.116) has multiple resources available for interview preparation, so stop by early in the job search process. Remember that a successful interview is one that generates either a job offer or another interview.

On-Campus Recruiting

The On-Campus Recruiting system (OCR) provides you with an excellent opportunity to interview with a variety of different employers. Many companies come to campus to recruit each semester, and OCR gives you the chance to interface with them.

When dropping your resume (i.e. - applying to a position) and scheduling interviews through our office, you should contact only those companies that genuinely interest you. Do not use OCR for practice interviewing. This is unethical. Many times, students will go click-crazy and drop their resume for 20 or 30 positions. This is irresponsible both to the companies with whom you have applied and also to your peers who may be genuinely interested in those positions. If you apply for jobs that you wouldn't take even if you got an offer, you may be stealing opportunities from your peers. Doing this is inconsiderate and selfish.

An employer typically spends approximately \$5,000 to send a recruiter on a campus visit. Unprepared job candidates could discourage company recruiters from visiting our campus in the future and thus limit the number of job openings available each subsequent recruiting season.

It is a wise idea to apply to a few (1-3, not 5-7) "back-up" positions in case your dream job does not work out. These back-up applications should be companies for which you would still be interested in working. Remember that your back-up might be someone else's dream job, and it would sure be a shame to take that opportunity from someone. Thoroughly think through your decision to apply to a position.

McCombs Career Services Code of Ethics

Students are expected to represent both themselves and the school in a manner that demonstrates the highest standards of professionalism and integrity which includes, but is not limited to, the guidelines for behavior detailed below. All students who utilize the OCR system must agree to follow the McCombs Career Services Code of Ethics.

By agreeing to follow these standards for professional and ethical behavior for career services, all McCombs students agree to:

McCombs Career Services Code of Ethics

- 1. Provide Accurate Information
- 2. Submit an R.S.V.P. When Asked
- 3. Prepare Sufficiently
- 4. Arrive on Time
- 5. Dress Professionally
- 6. Show Respect for Recruiters, Employers and the Career Services Staff
- 7. Apply Only for Positions That Match Your Abilities and Interests
- 8. Stand Behind Your Commitment After Accepting an Internship or Full-Time Job Offer
- 9. Report Your Employment Status

Additional details on each of the nine guidelines listed above can be found here: www.mccombs.utexas.edu/BBA/Career-Services/Ethics-Code.aspx

Compliance with the McCombs Career Services Code of Ethics is mandatory. Compliance with the McCombs Code of Ethics allows students to continue to have access to all McCombs recruiting privileges including access to the on-campus recruiting system. Violations of the policy can lead to loss of those privileges. Furthermore, dishonesty or highly improper conduct may also be subject to referral to The University of Texas at Austin Student Judicial Services office. That office will conduct its own investigation and may take additional punitive actions in accordance with university policies and procedures.

How to Prepare for an Interview

The main purpose of an interview is to sell yourself to a company/agency and convince them that they should hire you. Imagine that you are a salesperson and that you are selling the most valuable product ... you! As with any sales presentation, you want to make sure that you are as prepared as possible. Preparation is the key to interviewing success!

There are four general things that you should make sure to do before walking into any interview:

- 1. **Know yourself.** Spend some time thinking through your past experiences. You might go through the classes you've taken, the organizations you've been a part of, and the other experiences you've had in college. Be able to articulate what you learned from those experiences and how they showcase your skills.
- 2. **Know the company/position.** Start by exploring the web site and reading through all the information you can get your hands on. As a supplement, read through Vault, Going Global, Glassdoor.com and Reference USA reviews on the company. Have conversations with current or former employees and interns. Gather as much information as you can. Review the Company Research Instructional Guide for resources and guidance on what to research.
- 3. **Get a good night's rest.** Be smart, and don't go out the night before an important interview. Part of good interviewing is being able to manipulate information and relate experiences on the fly. You will interact better after a full night's sleep.
- 4. Rehearse answers to possible questions with a friend, roommate, or family member. Practice your answer to "Tell me about yourself," and refer to sample interview questions, located in this guide. Have a roommate or friend ask you several of these questions in a somewhat formal setting. Think through your answers to likely questions, but avoid word-for-word scripting because your interviewer will be able to tell that you aren't speaking candidly. Schedule a mock interview with a BBA Career Advisor to get valuable feedback, and participate in other mock interviews on campus.

Components of an Interview

The typical on-campus interview will last 30 - 45 minutes, although some may be longer. Typically, the employer will lead the discussion, indicating when it is time for you to ask questions or when the interview has come to a conclusion.

Confirm your interview date and time via OCR or an e-mail from whoever scheduled the interview. Arrive at the interview site at least 15 minutes early. You can use the extra time to relax and focus on what you want to say. The recruiter begins to evaluate you the second you are identified in the waiting area. Shake the recruiter's hand firmly upon being introduced in a confident and business-like manner.

Basic Timeline of a 30 Minute Interview

- 5 minutes: introductions and small talk
- 10 15 minutes: a short discussion of how your background relates to the job
- 5 10 minutes: your opportunity to ask questions
- 5 minutes: conclusion of interview

A number of interviewers begin the interview chatting about general topics. This small talk may cover UT sports, current events or what it is like to live in Austin. First impressions are often the most important so this phase of the interview is crucial. Even though the small talk seems informal, it has a definite purpose. It is a good time for the recruiter to judge your communication skills. To make this time most effective, interact with the employer, do not just sit there or nod and agree with everything being said.

Types of Interviews

Traditional Interviews

What are they?

The traditional interview is the most basic interviewing form, and can consist of questions ranging anywhere from your academic history to your personal interests. Any of the sample questions provided in the packet could come up in a traditional interview. Preparing prior to the interview is essential.

Who uses them?

All majors and industries

How do I prepare?

Review sample questions and think of answers that would highlight your skills and experiences and express to the recruiter that you are a good fit for the position and the company. Make sure to research the company with which you will be interviewing. Plenty of company material, as well as books and online resources are available in the BBA Career Services office and the BBA Career Services web site.

Behavioral Interviews

What are they?

Ron Fry's book, 101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions, tells us that in behavioral interviews, your conversations with the interviewer will narrow in on your past experience as he/she tries to learn more about how you have already behaved in a variety of on-the-job situations. This type of interview is grounded in the belief that your past behavior is the best indicator of your future reactions on the job.

Who uses them?

All majors and industries

How do I prepare?

Practicing sample questions will help you flesh out examples which demonstrate traits you want to highlight in the interview based on the research you've done on the company and the position. Know your resume since many questions can come from the jobs and organizations listed on this document. Utilizing the STAR Technique (details on STAR are in this guide) can be very helpful in answering behavioral questions. Lastly, practice makes perfect - Career Services conducts mock interviews where you can get feedback on your answers, mannerisms and overall performance.

Types of Interviews (Cont'd.)

Case Interviews

What are they?

These interviews tap into your problem-solving, analytical, strategic and logic skills through your analysis of business questions. You are challenged to think on your feet in a time-sensitive and pressured situation. Unlike most other types of interviews, it is an interactive process in which your interviewer will present you with a business problem and ask for your opinion. Your job is to ask the interviewer logical questions that will permit you to make a detailed recommendation. What the interviewer is looking for is a thought process that is analytical and creative. Case interview questions typically include analyses of the Industry, Market Expansion, Profitability Improvement and/or Market Sizing/Brain Teaser questions.

Who uses them? All majors depending on the industry. Very common in consulting industries.

How do I prepare? Success in case interviewing requires EXTENSIVE practice! Student who have

participated in case interviewing suggest practicing a minimum of 100 cases prior to your first interview, so start as early as possible. Get involved in case competitions on campus, attend case workshops offered by firms who conduct case interviews, and find partners to practice cases with. Meet with a Career Advisor to discuss resources for

prepping for case interviews.

Technical Interviews

What are they? Ace the Technical Interview explains that a technical interview is geared toward the data

processing industry and focuses on your character and your job-related experience,

primarily the hardware, software and applications you have mastered.

Who uses them? High-tech companies and companies interviewing MIS and STM/ERB majors

How do I prepare? Ask about the specific job requirements and related issues and prepare for these types

of questions. Update yourself on technical skills and find out if your interviewer is likely to be the MIS director or someone from Human Resources. Visit BBA Career Services

for resources.

During the Interview

In the first few minutes of any interview, you may have to make a presentation about yourself. Often, the interviewer will utter that infamous statement "So...tell me about yourself". How do you respond? In an interview situation, it is best not to go over a couple minutes when giving an answer; therefore you need to practice a brief and concise introduction. In this introduction, you should include some key points including who you are and what makes you interesting, your educational background, your work experience/internships/academic projects/leadership and the reasons you want to work for their company. Emphasize why you chose the specific company, how enthusiastic you are about the interview and skills that you possess that make you a good fit for this company. Explain what you have to offer this organization. Use the 60 Second Introduction information (found in the Networking Strategies instructional guide) to guide your answer to this question.

When the interviewer begins asking about your resume and/or asking general interview questions, it's time to sell yourself. You should express why you are the best candidate for the job through well thought-out answers. The interviewer will also be asking questions to pull out certain skills. Be sure to emphasize how the skills and experience you have fit with the position you're interviewing for. For example, if you are answering a question on how you get along with people, try to tie in examples of teamwork. Also, look for clues that the interviewer seems interested; if the interviewer appears distracted or puzzled, try to engage him/her to regain that interest.

Answering Behavioral Questions

Utilize the S.T.A.R. approach to organize your thoughts and structure your answers to behavioral questions. This approach guides you to answer each interview question with an explanation of a situation, task, your actions and your results/ reflection. Using S.T.A.R. can help you organize your thoughts in a clear and concise way, with a focus on your strengths and accomplishments.

SITUATION/TASK (this provides the context of the situation)

Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. Discuss specific examples related to work, school, or extra-curricular activities.

ACTION you took

Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Describe what you actually did rather than what you "would like to" do or "would have" done. Again, these aren't hypothetical questions.

RESULTS you achieved & REFLECTION

What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? The key is to focus on **RESULTS!** Quantify when possible. Provide details, dollar amounts and specific successes. Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).

Questions a Recruiter May Ask

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your goals and objectives?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- What do you really want to do?
- What are your weaknesses/strengths? (What are your three biggest weaknesses?)
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think someone who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you think will make you successful in business?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and employees.
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Why did you select The University of Texas at Austin?

- Why did you choose your major?
- What course did you like best/least? Why?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently?
- What was your favorite activity in school?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- How do you handle criticism?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you?
- Why did you decide to seek this position?
- What do you know about our company?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What is the hardest thing you have ever had to do?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Have you been to our web site? Please give me your comments-what did you like and dislike?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?
- Tell me about a time when you made a decision that turned out to be wrong.
- How do you set your personal priorities?

For more questions, there are several books in BBA Career Services that have lists of frequently-asked interview questions and answers to them. One such title is Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions. Quintcareers also has a great database or interview questions found here: www.quintcareers.com/interview question database

Handling Unacceptable Questions

Excerpted from The Dallas Times Herald, "Can They Ask Me That?"

As job applicants, students work hard to portray a professional image to recruiters that distinguishes them in a positive way. A conscious effort is made to avoid any circumstances that might cause an uncomfortable situation to arise. For this reason, the ticklish area of what questions a company can legally ask and how one should respond to such questions is a dilemma many students face.

An interviewer may ask any question they want; however, they may not base employment decisions on discriminatory elements. How is this distinction made? If an individual is asked questions regarding age, sex, marital status, and then is not offered a job, a company will find itself explaining why these questions were asked in the first place during any judicial proceedings. It presents a difficult defense position for the firm.

So how does the job applicant handle the "unacceptable question"? "You have to make a decision as to whether it is important to you," says Fredric Jablin, a former professor in the Speech and Communication department at UT. Professor Jablin also suggests trying to determine the intent of the question. Per Jablin, "Skip the question and jump to the underlying reason. Try to respond rather than jumping on the legality of the question." For example, if asked about marriage plans, one should assure the interviewer that she/he has a firm commitment to performing the job.

Professor Jablin adds these additional thoughts: "If a question is truly offensive, you might give some thought to whether you want to work there anyway. If an organization is not going to train people to not ask blatantly illegal questions, it may indicate something about the company." Below are some examples of both acceptable and unacceptable questions.

Acceptable Questions

- Are you a U.S. citizen or otherwise authorized to work in the United States?
 Employers must ask all new hires for proof of identity and eligibility for employment. However, it is illegal to discriminate against legal aliens on the basis of citizenship status or national origin.
- What foreign language(s) can you speak or write?

This is acceptable if it is a bona fide occupational qualification. Knowledge of how one learned a language may be a basis of discrimination.

• Will you expect to have certain religious holidays off?

Because of the sensitive nature of discharging or refusing to hire an employee or applicant because of religious beliefs, the employer has the burden of proving that an undue hardship renders the required accommodations to the religious need of the employee unreasonable. Notice that this question does not apply to religious beliefs, but to days off.

Unacceptable Questions

Below are some examples of how you might tactfully answer an unacceptable question.

- Q. Do you feel that your race/color will be a problem in your performing the job
- **A.** I've had extensive experience working with people with a variety of backgrounds. A person's race, whatever it may be, should not interfere in the work environment.
- Q. Where were you born?
- **A.** I am a permanent resident of the U.S. and have legal permission to work here.
- Q. Do you have any handicap?
- **A.** Any disabilities I may possess would in no way interfere with my ability to perform all aspects of this position.
- Q. What church do you attend?
- **A.** My religious preference should have no relationship to my job performance.
- Q. Do you have plans for having children?
- **A.** I do not know at present. I plan on a career and believe my career will be successful with or without family.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

When the interviewer asks, "Do you have any questions?" the best way to leave a bad impression is to say, "No, I don't think so." There has to be something the interview has not covered, if not about the position then at least about the company or industry. Ask a few questions to indicate that you paid attention to what has been said and would like to follow-up on some thoughts. The keys to a successful interview are (1) preparation and (2) good communication with the recruiter. One of the fastest ways to eliminate yourself from consideration from the job is to exhibit ignorance about the company, ask inappropriate questions, or ask questions that could have easily been answered by the company literature.

- What do you see as the strengths of the department?
- How receptive is the organization to new ideas?
- What training and programs are available to help me grow professionally?
- What are my potential career paths within the company?
- What markets does the company anticipate developing?
- What is the biggest single problem facing the organization now?
- What new product/service/client is the company actively pursuing?
- During the training period, how much exposure is there to different areas of the firm?
- After the training period, how does one choose the area assignment?
- What do you like best about this company? Least?
- What skills have helped you the most?
- What freedom would I have in determining my work objectives, deadlines, and methods evaluation?
- Where could a person go who is successful in this position?

- How is an employee evaluated?
- How is communication handled within and between departments?
- What do you consider the five most important day-today responsibilities of this job?
- What attracted you to this organization?
- If you could change some things about the company, what would they be?
- What does this company value the most, and how do you think my work for you will further these values?
- In your opinion, what is the most important contribution this company expects from its employees?
- In what ways has the experience of working here surprised or disappointed you?
- What challenges might I encounter if I take on this position?
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared with the competition (name one or two companies)?
- What types of people seem to excel here?

Closing the Interview

The conclusion of the interview can be very important. You are being evaluated until the recruiter escorts you out the door. When a recruiter asks if there is anything else you would like to add, this is a great time to emphasize a point or just express to the interviewer how interested you are in this opportunity. **Asking for the job** at the end of the interview is a key move which many students unfortunately don't make. By restating your interest or by asking when you should expect to hear from the recruiter, you demonstrate that you sincerely want this job. And remember...the interview is not over until you send a thank you letter. Refer to our Job Search Correspondence guide for more information on thank you e-mails and letters.

After the interview, ask yourself these important questions:

- Did I make a professional first impression?
- Was my handshake firm at the start and end of the interview?
- Did I maintain good eye contact?
- Did I express myself well by talking clearly and correctly?
- Did I express interest and enthusiasm for the job?
- Did I demonstrate knowledge of the company and the industry in general?
- Did I present my abilities and qualifications in terms of the requirements for this job?
- Did I thank the interviewer and find out about follow-up?
- Did I ask for the job?
- Did I get the interviewer's business card or contact information?

Recruiter Evaluations of McCombs Students

Company recruiters are asked to fill out evaluations on the students that they interview on campus. The following comments are major themes that have emerged from the evaluations.

- Little or no research done on the company, position, or industry
- Students were not sure of the job description
- Students lacked enthusiasm and did not exhibit interest in the job
- Students did not ask questions
- The students as a group do not seem "focused" on what they want to do (i.e. marketing vs. finance)
- Some students were well prepared, but many had no direction at all
- Comfortable with direct questions but indicated surprise at open-ended questions
- Overall preparation was good, but not on par with some schools; many students were not prepared
- Candidates not as well versed on recent company activities
- Students did not ask for the job

General Interviewing Tips

- Enter the room confidently. Walk in with a positive attitude and head held high. Give a firm handshake. Visualize walking into the room confidently and doing everything right.
- Let the interviewer ask you to sit. It's generally a good idea to wait for the interviewer to ask you to take a seat. If she/he does not, you should ask, and s/he will tell you to have a seat.
- **Be yourself at the interview.** Don't put on an air or be someone you are not. Behaving normally will help you to be less nervous, more confident and more genuine.
- Maintain good posture. Don't slouch and keep your shoulders back, even as you are leaning in. It is a good idea to lean slightly forward when listening and talking because those body language cues indicate interest and attentiveness.
- **Maintain good eye contact.** Do not stare. Relax your face muscles, and try to keep a slight smile throughout the interview if it is appropriate.
- **Don't rush an answer.** Listen carefully and respond accordingly. It is perfectly okay to pause for a few seconds to collect your thoughts before answering directly.
- Be decisive in your answers. Use the STAR technique to organize your thoughts. Avoid changing your answers in mid-sentence.
- Try to convey sincere interest and enthusiasm. Your tone of voice can say a lot about yourself, your interest in the organization, as well as in the interviewer.
- Use proper language and avoid slang. Articulate clearly, do not mumble.
- **SMILE!** A smile makes you appear agreeable, warm and pleasant. Smiles are infectious and can be useful in breaking through to a "bad cop" interviewer.
- Avoid talking solely about the accomplishments of the group. Recruiters are interested in learning about *you* and *your* role in team work.
- Match the conversational style of your recruiter(s). If your recruiter is joking with you, feel free to joke back, but always be respectful.
- If you don't know the answer, just say so. Recruiters will sometimes throw off-the-wall questions at interviewees for the specific purpose of seeing how the candidate responds when asked for information that he does not—and perhaps could not possibly—have. Our advice is to skip the floundering and respond with "I'm not sure. If you'd like, I can look into it and get back to you."
- Stay calm and relax. The recruiter is watching the way you handle yourself in high-pressure situations.
- Take heart if you don't get the offer you were looking for. Part of what recruiters are looking for is "fit" and it is best to work for an organization where you fit. If you still want the job, ask the recruiter what you can do to make yourself a better candidate and follow their advice.