Tips for Interviewing

Although interviewing and public speaking may seem very different, they have quite a bit in common. For example, interview answers should be organized, supported with examples, stay within a certain time limit, be delivered with energy, and should be practiced. Here are a few more specific tips to help with your interview.

- **Dress professionally.** People unconsciously judge us based partly on what we look like.
- **Arrive 5-7 minutes early.** If you arrive before that, you might be inconveniencing the office staff. However, arriving late is much worse. Most Americans are very sensitive to time and, as a sign of respect, expect that you be punctual.
- **The interview begins the moment you begin communicating** with the organization’s representatives. This includes your interactions with the office manager as you walk through the door!
- **Know the type of questions** that may be asked of you and practice your responses.
- **Research the organization** you are interviewing with. You should know published goals, successes, and challenges of the organization, as well as have an opinion on them. If interviewing for graduate school, know something about the university, department, faculty members, and program expectations.
- **Practice!** When you practice try to simulate the interview as much as possible. If you know it will be a phone or internet webcam interview, practice with a friend using the same medium as will be used in the interview. This will help immensely.
- **Bring paper and a pen.** You may need to take notes during the interview.
- As the interview begins, it is likely that the interviewers will introduce themselves and shake your hand. **Practice this exchange** with a friend; be sure you have an appropriately confident handshake and remember their name.
- **When appropriate, use the interviewer’s name** (be sure you pronounce it correctly!).
- **Think about organizing** your answer before you begin speaking. For example, you might think of two points that you’d like to address in response to the question. Keep those two points in mind and stay on track with your answer.
- **Think about ways to use examples to support your answers.** It is much more effective to have a concrete example in mind when addressing a question.
• During the interview be conscious of your nonverbal communication (e.g., tapping/twirling of your pen, bouncing leg, nervous hands, and eye contact). Interviewers are trying to get to know you and nonverbal communication can either complement or contradict what you are saying.

• Maintain good posture. This doesn’t have to mean sitting in a stiff, overly formal manner. Do be aware of your mannerisms, however. If you appear uncomfortable or overly comfortable, the interviewer might take note of that behavior and interpret it negatively.

• Make eye contact with each interviewer (don’t answer questions while looking away). Generally, Americans will associate eye contact with confidence and truthfulness. Be aware however, as there are frequently exceptions to these cultural norms.

• Be confident in your responses. Avoid unnecessarily pausing or hedging your statements (e.g., “I think . . . ,” “This might be a good answer . . . ,” “I’m not sure, but . . .”). Practicing will significantly help with this!

• Before you respond to a question, be sure you understand what is asked. If you don’t understand, ask for clarification. This might be a situation in which you use your writing pad for notes. Failure to understand the question will result in an embarrassing situation.

• Be conscious of the time. In an interview there is a fine balance between being too short on your responses and being too longwinded. It really depends on the length of the interview and the intentions of the interviewers. Use your best judgment here.

• Almost all interviews will end with the interviewer asking you if you have any questions. Conventional wisdom is that the interviewee should always have a question for the interviewers. Because they are likely to expect a question, you should have some in mind before coming to the interview.

For more information about the content of your answers and expectations of the interviewer, talk to faculty members or departmental advisors in your discipline.

You will also find good advice about interviewing at the Southern Miss Office of Career Services (located in McLemore Hall, room 125 or visit their web site at: http://www.usm.edu/cs/). In particular, you might consider using the “Perfect Interview” software on the web site that allows you to practice interview questions with an interactive video.

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