Interview Preparation Guide

Introduction – Getting Started

Interview preparation is a significant step in securing employment and includes comprehensive research of a company and a reassessment of your skills and abilities. In addition, developing answers to potential questions, practicing those answers, and preparing questions to ask the interviewer is important. At the end of the day, practice makes perfect, and is the best way to prepare. To make the interview process a successful and rewarding one, you must:

1. Research! Almost every interview will contain a question asking you what you know about the organization. Information can be found on the internet as well as press releases and news articles regarding the company.
2. Practice answering the questions you think they will ask. Use the job description to identify possible questions. The more prepared you are, the more eloquent you will sound.
3. Be prepared with three questions of your own to ask the employer. They can be about the job and organization, but not inquiries about salary and benefits.
4. Bring a copy of the job description, your resume, and three references.

Reassessment

Reassess your knowledge, experience, skills, attitudes, achievements and values, relative to the requirements outlined in the job description. Develop a list of your strongest skills and experiences as they relate to the position and be prepared to talk about them. Preparation conveys to the employer that you are interested and conscientious. Below is a list of skills that are commonly required in the working world. Review your past work experiences and resume to brainstorm examples of how you have demonstrated each of these transferable skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptability/Flexibility</th>
<th>Failure/Learning from Mistakes</th>
<th>Managing Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention to Detail</td>
<td>Judgement</td>
<td>Planning and Organizing</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
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<td>Conflict Management</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Presenting/Speaking</td>
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<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Technical &amp; Professional Knowledge</td>
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<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
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<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Time Management</td>
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Concerned that one of these areas encompasses a weakness of yours? Simply brainstorm ways to overcome this weakness and create a plan of action. This way, when employers ask about a particular skill—even if it is a weakness—you are prepared and can tell them exactly how you plan to improve in this particular area.
Formulate Your Answers
To create your answers to the interview questions, we recommend that you use the STAR method. Search the job description for required skills and then formulate your answers to reflect these skills.

**SITUATION**
Give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome. Keep this portion of your answer brief, but be sure to include key details such as who, when and where.

**TASK**
Describe the tasks involved in the situation by clearly explaining what you did.

**ACTION**
Explain what you did in response to the situation. This should be the heart of your answer as it demonstrates your skills, knowledge and experience.

**RESULT**
Focus on the outcome, accomplishments or improvements that you made.

*Example of a STAR answer:*

**Question:** Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or instructor? How did you resolve it?

<table>
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<th>Skill Being Highlighted – Conflict Management</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SITUATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>While working at a tutoring centre I believed the work a student was doing was too easy for her and she should be placed in a higher level whereas my supervisor felt that the student should stay at her current level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TASK</strong></td>
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<td>In order to resolve the conflict, both my supervisor and I shared our points of view. I carefully listened to my supervisor as she explained to me that the parents had concerns about moving their child to the next level level. I then shared with my supervisor the students work to show her that the student had achieved perfect on everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With consultation with the parents, both my supervisor and I decided that we would regularly give the student enrichment questions from the level above while keeping the student in the same level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESULT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This compromise was an effective way to resolve the problem as it satisfied all parties involved. It also benefited the student as it provided her with challenges that enhanced her learning.</td>
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*Remember—The more answers you prepare in advance, the better you will perform in the interview.*

**Common Types of Interviews**

- **One-on-One** – One interviewer and one candidate
- **Panel** – One candidate and two or more people asking questions
- **Group** – Several candidates interviewed at the same time, in the same location
- **Audition** – Candidate required to perform a task to demonstrate their knowledge/experience
- **Telephone and Video Conference** – Used as a pre-screening tool or when distance is a factor
*Note—it is important to realize that there are several different types of interviews. Don’t be afraid to ask the recruiter what type of interview will be conducted as this will help you better prepare for it.

Sample Interview Questions to Practice with:

**Behavioural-Based Questions**

- Describe a time in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give me an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to build a rapport with someone, even when the situation was a difficult one.
- Give me an example of a time in which you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates at work.
- Tell me about an experience that illustrates your ability to take initiative. Feel free to use an example from your work, community or school life.
- Time management has become a necessary factor in personal productivity. Give an example of any time management skills you have learned and applied. What resulted from those skills?

**Motivational Questions (Personality/Interests)**

- Tell us about yourself.
- What are your most prominent skills/strengths?
- Which of your jobs did you like the least? Which job did you like the most? Why?
- What kind of an employee are you?
- How do you normally handle change?
- Looking back on your experiences, what are you most proud of?
- What skills have you acquired from previous work experiences?
- Describe yourself in one word.
- What are your accomplishments outside of work/school? What skills have you developed?
- How do you handle conflict with your peers?
- What kind of people do you prefer to work with?

**Job Search/Career Goals Related Questions**

- What are you looking for in your next job? How does this position fit with your career goals?
- What are your career goals? Where do you hope to be in five years from now?
- What kind of contribution do you think you could make to our organization?
- What part of this job interests you the most? What part of this job interests you the least?
- Why should we hire you?
- Why did you choose the career path you are pursuing?
Challenging Interview Questions

- How would a friend describe you? How would someone who dislikes you describe you?
- What do you consider to be your weaknesses or shortcomings?
- Describe something you’ve done for which you are not proud of.
- What have previous employers identified as areas needing improvement?
- What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?

Below are online resources that can help you prepare for these types of questions:

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<td><a href="http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/">http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/</a></td>
<td>This online resource is full of tips on how to create an effective resume, unique cover letter, and a professional image in an interview. It provides sample interview questions as well as examples on how to answer each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.InterviewStream.com">http://www.InterviewStream.com</a></td>
<td>Offers students an online video-based interviewing system that provides feedback on communication skills and body language.</td>
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Interview Tips

Your clothes should be appropriate for the organization. When in doubt, dress conservatively. Clothing should be freshly cleaned and pressed or dry cleaned. Check for missing buttons, zippers that don’t work and hemlines that need to be repaired.

- Arrive 15 minutes early. This allows you to relax and rehearse what you want to say.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, something to write on and something to write with.
- If a group is interviewing you, address the individual that asked the question as well as glancing at others as you give your answer.
- Do not say anything negative about your past employers.
- Listen carefully to what the interviewer has to say. You need to know what has been said in order to answer effectively.
- Be enthusiastic. Be yourself!

*Remember—There are no second chances to make a good first impression! Preparing will help ease anxiety, make you appear more confident, as well as show your initiative.*

Resources Available at the Science Career and Cooperative Education Centre

How can SCCE support you? Book a mock interview appointment with our career advisor by visiting OSCARplus - [www.oscarplusmcmaster.ca](http://www.oscarplusmcmaster.ca).