

## **Interview Tips**

**Only about 2% of applicants actually get an interview so make the most of this important opportunity by taking it seriously.**

### **Purpose of an interview**

Employers conduct interviews to determine how you handle yourself in a real time situation. Interviews help to determine your poise, ability to communicate, problem solving skills, personal priorities, attitudes, ability to handle difficult situations, and ability to focus your thinking and summarize.

### **Prepare for the interview**

The more you know about the employer, its goals, services, and clients, the more credible you will be in the interview. Use the internet, annual reports, directories, and other resources to research the organization and the specific department. If possible, find out about current projects to which you can contribute. Be familiar with similar jobs and read the specific job description, so you can match your credentials to the stated requirements. Prepare several questions for the interviewer to show you have done your homework.

### **Topics an interview may cover**

Think in advance about how you might answer questions about your career goals, education and training, work experience, relevant personal experience, skills and aptitudes related to the job, and your attitudes and personality characteristics. Be prepared with specific examples that positively reflect who you are. Also prepare to handle difficult questions, like a break in work history, in an honest and positive way.

### **Practice your interviewing skills**

Practice what you might say with a friend or in front of a mirror. Decide what you want to stress in the interview. Practice giving a complete but concise story of an event and include key points, results, and outcomes. Be specific about what YOU did, said, felt, and thought. Separate your actions from those of others with more "I" than "we" examples, but do include teamwork in discussions.

### **When interviewing, DO**

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early to be on time for the interview
- Dress conservatively and ensure your appearance is neat and clean
- Bring materials for notes, your resume, work samples, work permits, references, and a written work history to fill out the job application
- Provide a friendly and firm handshake
- Make good eye contact
- Respond to chitchat to show poise
- Watch and listen for interviewer cues about when and where to sit, when to stand
- Ask questions related to the position and the department
- Thank the interviewer(s) verbally
- Write a thank you note the same day to everyone with whom you spoke about the job

**When interviewing, DO NOT**

- Bring anyone else along for the interview
- Exaggerate your qualifications
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Generalize your examples
- Digress from the specific event or example
- Talk too much and ramble with excess detail
- Give repetitive examples
- Avoid difficult topics or questions that may imply your wish to hide something
- Criticize former employers or coworkers
- Bring up personal issues

**Questions you do not have to answer**

Interview questions should be job related. There are certain kinds of questions interviewers should not ask because they are inappropriate or unlawful. To make yourself familiar with the types of questions that can and should not be asked, visit:

<http://uhr.rutgers.edu/ee/InterviewDosandDontsOEE.htm>.

**Negotiating salary and benefits**

Be flexible in considering what you want and need for salary and benefits. Do not tie yourself into a specific dollar amount. Ask what the salary range is for the position, then mention a wide range that includes the lowest figure you will accept and the highest you would like. Be realistic, most positions are tied to organizational systems and there may not be much leeway in negotiating salary. Also, be sure to compare both current salary and benefits to future salary and benefits. You may find that one balances the other. For example, are you willing to trade a bit of salary for the luxury of flextime? Try to defer salary discussions to the end of the interview process when you are sure the company has a genuine interest in you and your bargaining power will be stronger. You can use your current compensation and benefits statement (available at <https://uhr.rutgers.edu/benefitsstatement/login.aspx>) to determine what you wish to ask for in the new position.