

The Interviewing Skills Handbook



Information provided by:
Career Development Center
Jefferson College of Health Professions
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Interviewing Skills Introduction

An interview is an exchange of information. It allows the employer to evaluate your personality, communication skills, attitudes, values, motivation, interests, and technical skills. The interview also enables you to obtain information about the organization in order to make an informed decision.

An interview is a discussion between equals. Although you need to treat the interviewer(s) with respect, there is no need to be overly deferential.

Knowing how to interview is one of the best skills you will ever have. The following information will provide you with steps to effective preparation, success on the interview day and effective follow up.

5 Steps to Effective Preparation

Step 1: RESEARCH

Prepare for the interview by researching the facility. You should know enough about the facility to justify why you are looking for employment with them and to come up with insightful questions about the facility.

RESEARCH SOURCES:

1) **The Internet**

Review the facility's website. Look at all current openings (what other types of jobs are available at the facility?) This can provide you with helpful information about career paths, etc. Look at the web site from the vantage point of a client or patient: How does the facility present itself to its patients/clients?

2) **Alumni**

Try to find Jefferson alumni at the facility (there are alumni binders for each major located in the Career Development Center). Give them at least a week to respond to you, or possibly longer. Don't ask what the interview questions will be. Do ask about their jobs, job culture, etc.

3) **The Person Who Calls To Set Up The Interview**

Ask him or her to send you a copy of the annual report and other materials that may be helpful including a philosophy of care manual, mission statement, etc. Compile the relevant facts from all of these sources including patient population, when the clinic was established, number of outpatient vs. inpatient visits, notable accomplishments, research endeavors, the unique qualities of the facility, recent mergers or acquisitions, etc. Try to understand the workings of the entire operation, including other departments that you, as a health care professional, would interface. **Remember, the more you know about the facility, the more focused your answers will be!**

Step 2: SELF-EXAMINATION

- Think about your strengths and how they might relate to the healthcare facility. For example, you may be interviewing with a regional spinal cord injury center affiliated with a prominent teaching hospital (i.e. you had a 10-week rotation at Loyola Medical Center in Chicago in their spinal cord injury unit and you treated paraplegics and quadriplegics).
- Examine your job-related skills, accomplishments, and goals. Specifically look for ways in which you stand out from your classmates.

Step 3: DEVELOP ANSWERS TO EXPECTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Be responsive and be prepared to give honest answers. Whenever possible, support your answers with specific examples from your own experience. Although this is not a complete list, below are a few of the "difficult" interview questions that our graduates have encountered (**Keep in mind the ways in which you stand out from other candidates as you reflect on answers to these questions**). If the employer asks a difficult question that you have not prepared for, ask for a minute to think about it and give a quality response. At the interview, you will need to convey how you will contribute to this facility's healthcare team by demonstrating a willingness to learn, previous skills and knowledge, and an understanding of the facilities' philosophy and goals.

"Tell me about yourself." "How would you describe yourself?"

"How did you become interested in this career or this specialty?"

"If I talked to your Clinical Instructor about your performance, what would he or she say?"

"How would a faculty member or a friend describe you?"

"Tell me how you found out about Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital."

"Why did you change careers?" What made you leave the field of accounting to become a cytotechnologist?"

"What are your strengths? Weaknesses?" "What class did you like best and why?" "Least?"

"I noticed that your grades dropped during the second semester of your junior year. Can you explain this?"

"Did you work while attending college? Why or why not?"

"Did you work in your chosen discipline while attending school? Why or why not?"

"What activities were you involved in during school?"

"What leadership skills do you possess? Describe a specific time when you used your leadership skills"

"Why should I hire you?" "In what ways can you contribute to this facility?"

"What is your greatest accomplishment and why?"

"Why did you choose Thomas Jefferson University? Why did you choose your major?"

"Did you like Jefferson's Diagnostic Imaging program? Did you like your faculty?"

"Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a faculty member or supervisor. What was the situation and how was it resolved?"

"I am going to give you a scenario about Mr. Brown. He is a 46-year old patient with testicular cancer. You walk into his room and you see that he has not eaten any of his dinner. What is the first step you would take in regards to this situation?"

***Illegal Questions**

During the course of your interview, you may be asked a question that is considered illegal by federal, state, or local laws. In the majority of cases, the employer will ask out of genuine curiosity or interest as opposed to using your answer to discriminate against you. However, these types of questions are not relevant to your ability to perform the functions of the job and you should not feel compelled to answer these questions. Some illegal topics are listed below:

AGE: As long as you meet minimum age requirements, this is irrelevant.

MARITAL STATUS/FAMILY: Questions concerning marital status, number of children, and family planning should not be asked.

RELIGION: Inquiries into religious denomination are unacceptable.

FINANCIAL STATUS: An applicant's credit history, charge/bank accounts, etc. is private information.

HEIGHT/WEIGHT: Unless this is a genuine occupational qualification, no inquiries should be made in this area.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY: While it is legal to ask if an applicant is authorized to work in the United States, it is illegal to inquire about an applicant's citizenship.

DISABILITIES: Although it is legal to inquire about an applicant's ability to perform job functions with or without accommodation, it is illegal to inquire about disabilities or medical history.

ARREST WORK: "Have you ever been convicted of...?" is a legal question (if the crime named can be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question) versus "Have you ever been arrested?" which is an illegal question.

If you are asked an illegal question, the optimal way to respond includes taking a moment to figure out the intent behind the question and responding to that intent.

Example:

Interviewer: "How many children do you have? Do you have children?"

Interviewee: "I can and will be able to fulfill the travel and work schedule that this position requires."

*If there is a chance that a potentially detrimental issue could arise such as a below average performance appraisal from a supervisor or poor academic grades one semester, you should have an answer prepared that puts the issue in a positive light. Never apologize for any shortcomings and avoid any comment that can be construed negatively. For example, you might explain that you had an unusually heavy study load that semester, that the experience helped you to improve your study skills and that you subsequently pulled up your grade point average the following semester and have maintained good grades ever since.

***Employ the PAR technique when answering difficult questions.
(Refer to the table below.)**

<u>Problem</u>	Describe a problem you faced or a task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event and supply the interviewer with enough detail to understand. This situation or problem may have arisen in a number of places including a previous job or school.
<u>Action you took</u>	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. If you are discussing a group project or effort, remember to focus on the actions you took and not the actions of the team.
<u>Results you achieved</u>	What happened? How did you resolve the problem or accomplish the task? What did you learn from the experience?

Step 4: PRACTICE YOUR ANSWERS

You have heard it before, but practice does make perfect. One possible way to practice is through a "mock interview" at the Career Development Center. We can help you critique your performance by evaluating the content of your answers, your body language, voice intonation, eye contact, and general demeanor. Interviewers will assess your personality and attitude, career goals, confidence level, communication skills (both verbal and nonverbal), accomplishments (academic as well as personal), and knowledge (an understanding of the organization and the career field).

Step 5: PREPARE A LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

You can also indicate your interest in the position by asking thoughtful, pertinent questions. Make sure that the questions that you ask are not questions that could have been answered through your research efforts. Remember to ask open-ended questions which will supply you with more information and allow the interviewer an opportunity to talk. If you do not ask questions, it may be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm for the position and the facility. We recommend asking three to four questions. It is perfectly acceptable to bring a written list of questions to the interview to use as a reference. Below is a list of possible questions that you may raise.

“What type of orientation program do you offer for new hires? Does your orientation program have a mentor component?”

“Does your unit offer a clinical ladder? How many of your staff members are Clinical Ladder 2, 3 or 4's? Approximately how long does it take to achieve each level and what is involved?”

“What is your multidisciplinary approach to patient care? How do the nurses and physical therapists communicate patient needs to the physicians?”

“What is your definition of a successful employee? What do you consider the skills/characteristics a person needs to do a great job in this organization?”

“What continuing education and/or tuition reimbursement benefits are available, and are they monetary or in time allotment?”

“What is your level of patient acuity?”

“What is the average seniority level among your staff members?”
“What percentage of your staff takes graduate courses?”
“May I look at your policy and procedure manual?”
“Are there any research projects taking place in your department? At what level are your staff members involved in research?”
“Do you review your staff’s performance on an annual basis or more frequently?”
“How will my performance be evaluated?”
“Do you hold staff meetings? Who attends?”
“Do you have journal club meetings?”
“How long is the staff here before they are encouraged to get involved in committee work?”
“What committees are your staff involved in?”
“How many candidates are you interviewing and when will you be making your decision? May I call you next week to check the status of the hiring process? Will you be holding second interviews?”

7 Steps to Success at the Interview*

Step 1: MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Initial impressions are seldom changed during the course of an interview. Therefore, be certain that everything that occurs in those first five minutes conveys the fact that you are a professional. This includes: Arriving at least 15 minutes before the scheduled interview time. Dressing professionally. It is better to be more formally dressed than underdressed. Women should wear comfortable, presentable shoes, stockings and should be conservative regarding make-up, hair, nails, jewelry or perfume. Men should wear dark dress socks and shoes that are shined and in good condition, and should be clean-shaven and conservative regarding cologne or visible jewelry and consider getting a haircut if necessary. Start with a firm handshake, a smile, and good eye contact.

Step 2: BRING RELEVANT INFORMATION

Bring several copies of your resume (to give to others with whom you may interview). Additionally, bring a separate, typed list of at least three professional references. Each of your references should have a professional relationship with you. Bring along any supporting materials you might have. These materials may include letters of recommendation, certifications, transcripts, or published papers or projects.

Step 3: BE HONEST

Do not overstate your qualifications, academic performance, background, length of employment, etc. The most important things are to be yourself, be confident in your educational preparation and experience, and have your career goals clearly defined.

Step 4: BE PERSONABLE AND POLITE TO EVERYONE

Every person you meet during the course of the day is a potential evaluator. This includes the parking attendant, door person, administrative assistant, waiter/waitress at lunch, etc.

Step 5: BE AWARE OF BOTH YOUR VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Make an effort to talk more deliberately and articulately than usual. Don't use the words "think," "guess" or "feel" which sound indecisive. Avoid phrases like "pretty good" or "fairly well". Avoid constant use of filler words like "you know", "right", "like", etc. Use positive words to describe your skills. Maintain reasonable eye contact and be aware of negative body language such as crossing your arms.

Step 6: LISTEN ATTENTIVELY

Listen effectively, paraphrase to clarify and confirm the interviewer's question and answer what is asked. Wait for the interviewer to finish speaking before formulating and delivering your answer.

Step 7: BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS SALARY

Be prepared to discuss the topic of salary intelligently. Research the field and find out what the average salary is for your chosen major (The Career Development Center has the most recent salary surveys produced by NACE and Salary.com, which consists of the average salary for each major). Understand that salary may vary according to geographic region, size of facility, experience, and education. Do not pinpoint a salary. If you are asked what you are expecting to earn, give a salary range (e.g. mid thirties or \$35,000-\$37,000) rather than quoting a specific figure. **Do not discuss salary if the employer does not raise the topic.**

***Types of Interviews**

Although you will be told what to expect in many cases, you may also be unaware until you actually begin your interview. Be prepared for any of the following types of interviews:

The Informational Interview: This is not a job interview. It is set up by you to obtain information and advice on facilities, settings, and job search strategies through conversations with professionals already working in a particular career.

The Screening Interview: Screening interviews are often very brief (15 to 45 minutes) and often occur in the human resources office. Although they are less intense than many of the other types, they are the most significant in many ways because they determine whether or not you'll be invited to continue in the process.

The Decision Interview: The person with the authority to hire you usually conducts this interview and it often entails interviews with several people over the course of a full day.

3 Steps to Effective Follow-up

Step 1: REVIEW THE DAY

Immediately following the interview, review the questions you had trouble answering. Reflect on ways in which you could answer them more effectively if they are ever asked again. Practice your revised answers aloud. Reflect on questions you answered particularly well and highlight those themes in the thank you letter.

Step 2: SEND A THANK-YOU LETTER

Send a typed thank-you letter to the interviewer (s) within 24 hours after the interview. While it may not affect the probability of receiving a job offer, it's a common courtesy and it may give you an advantage over other candidates. Please refer to the next few pages for ideas on how to write a thank-you letter. E-mail or type a letter to send in U.S. mail; thank you letters should never be hand-written.

STEP 3: FOLLOW-UP CALL

If you do not receive a response from the facility in a week or so or shortly after your thank-you letters have been sent, it is appropriate to call to inquire about the status of your application.

Conclusion

If you are invited back for a second interview, remember that you have better than a 50-50 chance of receiving a job offer. Prepare for this second interview. The second interview will concentrate on more specific subjects such as salary, benefits, bonuses, and options. Remember to only address these issues if the employer raises them. The second interview may involve a tour of the facility, interviews with staff from several areas of the facility, and possibly tests or forms to complete. The Interviewer should give you this information in advance.

Whether it is your first job or fifth job in healthcare, you want to find the "right" environment that matches your needs, values, skills, interests and goals. Don't be afraid to turn down a job offer, if after careful consideration, you feel it is not the right step for your career goals. If this is necessary, do so in writing and courteously because you never know what professional or personal ties this organization may have with others in your field.

Thank-You Letters

Thank-you letters are the final step in the interviewing process, and most employers are favorably impressed by this professional courtesy. Statistically, less than 10% of interviewees ever follow up with thank-you notes. Therefore, a thank-you note can make a candidate stand out from the rest of the applicants.

A thank-you note also puts your name in front of the interviewer one more time, and reemphasizes your interest in the position and your major qualifications. Your letter should briefly summarize your qualifications. Try to focus the thank-you letter toward specific items that you discussed during your interview. The more targeted the letter, the better.

How to Write a Thank-You Letter: (see attached examples)

- Send as soon as possible after the interview
- Express enthusiasm
- Answer any unresolved issues--answer and expand upon any useful questions raised in the meeting. If you forgot to mention certain points, the thank-you letter can address those items (briefly!)
- Express sincerity--it must be genuine, sincere, and recognize the importance of the meeting
- Personalize the letter--highlight a key point from your meeting that was unique and meaningful and will refresh the person's memory of you
- Keep it short
- Word process or type the note on conservative stationery or bond paper, 8.5" x 11" in size

Sample Thank-You Letter

1234 Smith Road
Philadelphia, PA 19107

October 10, 2004

Person's Name
Title
Department
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr./Individual's Name: (Try to avoid To Whom it May Concern or Dear Sir or Madam)

Thank you for taking the time to thoroughly discuss your graduate internship program with me yesterday during the course of our interview. I have given careful consideration to this position and I am certain that I would be achieving my present goals and meeting your needs by utilizing my BSN degree as an intern in your pediatric department.

I am excited by the opportunity to be affiliated with (**name of facility**) and would be willing to continue my education in the area of pediatric surgery if considered for this position.

I enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you and I appreciate the time you spent with me. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here)

Your Name (typed)

Sample Thank-You Letter

1234 Smith Road
Philadelphia, PA 19107

October 10, 2004

Person's Name
Title
Department
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Dr./Ms./Mr./Individual's Name: (Try to avoid To Whom it May Concern or Dear Sir or Madam)

Thank you for taking time to meet with me on **(date)** to discuss the position of **(title)**.

I was quite impressed with the programs that are currently in place, and am confident that I would be able to make a genuine contribution, as well as promote my personal and professional growth in the field.

I am very interested in the position of **(title)** and look forward to hearing from you regarding the results of my interview.

Thank you again for your courtesy and interest in my qualifications.

Sincerely,

(sign your name here)

Your Name (typed)