

INTERVIEWING GUIDE



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Many job seekers approach the interviewing process with a sense of apprehension borne of a fear of the unknown, but employment interviewing is simply a focused, goal-oriented exchange of information between two people. Impressive resumes and cover letters will get you employment interviews; however, the interview itself will typically be the most significant aspect of the employment process.

In its most basic form, the employment interview is an opportunity for applicants and employers to mutually evaluate the fit between the applicant's qualifications and the position being considered. Interviewing involves a **mutual** exchange of information based on two-way communication. It is not designed to be a process of inquisition or interrogation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

Although scores of books and hundreds of studies have been published on the interviewing process, no set recipe for a successful interview exists. However, its objectives are to:

- expand on information contained in your resume;
- supply information to the employer that is not contained in your resume (e.g., personality, oral communication skills, general style, etc.);
- gain additional information about the organization and the position you are considering; and,
- provide opportunity for both parties to discuss the possibility of employment.

To make a strict list of “do’s” and “don’ts” would diminish your individuality and tend to promote an artificial approach to the interview. You are unique, and you have specific qualifications and experiences to relate to employers. The success of the interviewing process is a reflection of the extent to which you effectively present your unique qualifications to employers. To merely show up at an interview, hoping that your resume or application will do all your talking for you, is not enough. Rather, you must be an active participant in the exchange of questions, answers, impressions, etc. Generally, the more conversational this exchange of information, the better.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Broadly speaking, there are two basic types of interviews: screening interviews and selection interviews. The **screening interview** is usually rather general and is relatively short (30-45 minutes). It is intended primarily to eliminate unqualified candidates from further consideration. For example, when employers recruit on a college campus, they use screening interviews to decide which of numerous candidates are potentially best qualified to meet their organization's needs. Screening interviews also may be conducted by phone or via videoconferencing software such as Skype. Selected candidates are then invited to the employer's office or plant for a second, more detailed interview.

The **selection interview**, a longer, more thorough interview, is designed to identify the most qualified candidate for the position. A selection interview may last up to one hour or more. It is not uncommon for a candidate to go through a sequence of four or five selection interviews with several different employment officials during the course of a day-long plant or office visit. This is also called a “second interview” and is discussed more thoroughly later in this guide.

Regardless of the type of interview, both the interviewer and interviewee will have dual roles. Each will be acting as screener and screened. Not only will you be presenting yourself and your qualifications, you will be evaluating whether or not you would consider working in the organization based on information and impressions you acquire in the interview. At the same time, the interviewer will be trying to discern your potential as an employee, as well as presenting his/her organization in an informative and appealing manner.

WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING

What are employers looking for in candidates? Not always what you may think. In a recent study on interviews, employers ranked oral communication, motivation, initiative, assertiveness, loyalty, leadership, maturity, enthusiasm, punctuality, and appearance the ten most important factors, in that order. Students in the study ranked the same ten attributes as significant, but placed them in different order. The study showed that the top ten attributes in the employers' ranking indicate that they are searching for basic "value system" attributes that are more enduring in nature. These are of a manager who can handle future responsibility and tenure with the organization. In comparison, the students' high ranking for enthusiasm, appearance, work experience, and so on indicates that students think employers emphasize more superficial attributes rather than deeper personality factors.

Although this research focused on business-oriented interviews, the indications are transferable to other career areas. From an employer's perspective, hiring you is a risk. Through studying some paperwork that you have submitted and talking with you over a relatively brief period of time, he or she is expected to make a sound decision. You have the opportunity to convince the employer of your "safety." By relating **specific** experiences and accomplishments, you must show them that you will fit into their organization and contribute to its purposes. Ultimately, the employer's decision reflects his or her opinion as to whether you **can** do the job and whether you **will** do the job.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Most candidates interviewing for a given position will have the basic qualifications necessary to do that job. However, it is typically the candidate who does the best job of **presenting** himself or herself who gets the job offer. Preparing thoroughly for your interview will better enable you to effectively present yourself and your qualifications as they relate to the position for which you are interviewing. Basic interview preparation should include:

- **Knowing Yourself.** Before going into any interview situation, you will need to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about yourself. Are your interests consistent with the general career area and this specific job? What are your employable skills and how do they correspond with this position? Is this opportunity compatible with your work values?
- **Knowing the Organization.** Knowledge of the organization, its products or services, locations, and needs is **essential** and **expected**. Be especially conscientious about researching the organization through both printed materials and the Internet. Most organizations have websites which contain a great deal of useful information. The more you know about the organization, the industry it represents, the position under consideration, and how all this relates to your own career goals, the more effective you will be. Thorough preparation will strengthen your self-confidence and will demonstrate sincere interest in the job. A lack of knowledge of the organization could greatly hurt your chances of being hired.
- **Clearly Defining Your Goals Prior to the Interview.** Employers look favorably upon candidates who have specific and well-defined career goals. In a recent study conducted at a large Eastern university, employers were asked to indicate why students were or were not given an interview and what selection criteria were used in making the decision. Poorly formulated career goals were most frequently mentioned as a factor contributing to denying an interview. Knowing what you want to do is difficult, but you will do well in an interview to start on a specific note. For example, you may say to an interviewer, "Ms. Nicks, I am particularly interested in a sales representative position with your company. Eventually, I would like to advance to a sales management position." Many mistakenly believe that the more general they are about what they want to do, the better their chances of getting a job. Focus as clearly as possible on your job objective.

- **Considering the Match.** Continue the interview preparation process by considering your interests, values, skills, and needs in relation to the specific job you are pursuing. How does this position fit in with your long-range goals? You may find it helpful to make a list with information about yourself in one column and information about the career and specific position in the other column. Be prepared to discuss the link-ups with your interviewer. Your task is to help the employer become as well-informed about your attributes and goals as you are. The better you relate your career interests and qualifications to the employer's needs, the more successful you will be.

PRACTICE HELPS!

You must be able to communicate information effectively to the employer. Strive to become as articulate and natural in your interview presentation as possible. There will probably be plenty of rough edges at first, but you'll almost surely find that your interviewing skills will improve quickly with practice. Studies have repeatedly supported the fact that interview training can improve performance. You do not want to sound like a recording that recites a pre-recorded word-for-word answer to an interviewer's questions. However, you do want to be able to communicate readily and easily about yourself. As a parallel, consider studying for an essay test. You study to learn general concepts and specific facts to support them. You do not usually weave concepts and facts together into an answer until you know the actual essay question. Preparing for an interview is quite similar. Know your general points and supporting examples; allow them to come together as the questions are asked.

Career Services offers numerous ways for you to practice interviewing skills. Take advantage of doing a practice interview (that is, a "Mock Interview") with a Career Services staff member. You will need to make an appointment in advance because of the popularity of this service, but most students find it extremely helpful in honing their interviewing skills and increasing their confidence. Also consider using **InterviewStream**, an online mock interview tool. InterviewStream is a practice interview system that allows job seekers the opportunity to see and hear themselves online. Using a webcam, you will be able to simulate job interviews by responding to pre-recorded interview questions and practice both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Afterwards, all interviews are immediately accessible online for feedback. InterviewStream is available 24/7 through your HireNKU account.

Remember, oral communication is the single most important evaluation criterion. It isn't necessarily the best-qualified candidate who gets the job, but rather the one who is best at **presenting** his or her qualifications. Your practice will pay off handsomely.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND INTERVIEWING BASICS

Getting your interview off to a good start is important. Again, by being prepared and knowing what to expect you can increase your effectiveness in the initial stages of the interview.

- **What to Wear.** When you are neatly groomed and appropriately dressed you create a favorable impression. The suit is the basic element of the interview wardrobe for men and women alike. Colors such as dark blue, black, or various shades of gray are considered most appropriate, although camel and beige are acceptable during the summer. Women may also wear dark brown, dark maroon, and medium blue. Fabric patterns such as solids, tweeds, muted plaids, and pinstripes create the most professional look. For men, white cotton shirts are best—ties are a must! Dark, over-the-calf socks and lace-up or slip-on shoes in brown, black or cordovan are the best choices. Women commonly wear tailored shirts or blouses in white, off-white, or a coordinating color. A basic medium-heeled pump in a color that complements the suit is recommended. Don't be trendy. Distracting jewelry, nail polish, make-up or perfume/cologne should be avoided. Overall, be immaculate. A good appearance reinforces your many positive attributes.

- **Be Punctual.** Your first opportunity to make a favorable impression on the interviewer is to be punctual. Never be late for an interview! Try to arrive early enough (five to 10 minutes) to allow time to check your appearance, collect your thoughts, etc. If for some reason you will be late, be certain to call ahead. One way to help you arrive on time is to visit the interview site in advance of the appointment to be sure you know how to get there. Upon arrival for your interview, greet the employer's receptionist or secretary courteously and with respect. First impressions really count!
- **Handling Introductions.** The introductions between you and your interviewer are important in getting the interview started on a positive note. Greet your interviewer with a smile, a firm handshake, and direct eye contact. The interview will generally begin with a social comment about the weather or such to put you at ease. Expect it and react in a normal, cordial fashion. Be sure to note your interviewer's name and use it during the interview. Always address the interviewer as "Mr." or "Ms." until he or she asks you to use a first name.
- **What to Bring.** Always carry extra copies of your **resume** to the interview. If you have updated your resume for the specific job for which you are interviewing, carry along the revised version and give it to the employer. In addition, you may want to bring along a copy of your **academic transcript** or a listing of courses you have completed. An increasing number of interviewers are interested in determining the actual courses you have taken and many will ask you to provide them with this information. Check with the Office of the Registrar to obtain a copy of your academic record. If appropriate (as in the case of advertising, journalism, art, or education), bring a **portfolio** containing samples or illustrations of your work.

It is also a good idea to carry a printed copy of your **references**, which indicates their names, titles, addresses and telephone numbers. You will also want to carry a pen and paper along to make notes following the interview, particularly about your impressions and about any requests the employer made that need your action. Do not take notes during the interview; devote your attention to the interviewer. Additionally, it is generally best to refrain from referring to notes during the interview.

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS: THE HEART OF THE INTERVIEW

The majority of the interview time is typically devoted to the employer asking you questions. Try to discern what an employer is really asking you. What are the underlying questions? For example, if an employer asks what qualities you think are important for someone in the position you are applying for, he or she probably really wants to know whether you have given thoughtful consideration to the skills and abilities necessary to succeed within his or her organization. Put yourself in the employer's frame of reference and respond as directly as possible. Your objectives are to put your candidacy in the best possible light and alleviate any reservations the employer may have about your suitability for employment. **BE YOURSELF AND FOCUS ON YOUR POSITIVE QUALITIES.**

If there are periods in your past that are difficult to explain, do not dwell on them. Respond to your interviewer's inquiries honestly, indicating what you have learned from your mistakes. Take responsibility for your past actions and do not blame others. If something in your past is indicative of poor judgment, try to give examples of more recent things you have done that indicate good judgment. Consider the following example:

Question: "Your GPA is a 2.3. That's considerably lower than the other people interviewing for this position. Care to comment?"

Response: “Yes, it is low. I’m convinced that my grades don’t adequately reflect the knowledge I’ve gained. The skills I have developed over the past four years both in and out of the classroom have prepared me for this position. For example, I have worked with a variety of people through the offices I’ve held in my fraternity. You’ll note that I was the chairperson of a successful charity fund-drive involving all fraternities and sororities on campus.”

In virtually all interviews, you will be asked direct as well as open-ended questions. Direct questions are focused and will elicit some specific information from you. Open-ended questions will allow you to bring more information into your answers that you want to provide to your interviewer. Such questions allow you the opportunity to elaborate upon topics you want to discuss. Deal as much as possible in details and relevant examples, such as job experiences, pertinent hobbies, travel, offices held, college and community organizations, school work, special projects, and honors. Answer questions by focusing on experiences, accomplishments, and skills you have that relate to the specific job for which you are interviewing.

Keep in mind that most interviewers are making comparative judgments as they screen numerous candidates. Therefore, they tend to ask questions that will best help them to differentiate candidates from one another. Try to determine what the interviewer is really asking and what the heart of the question is before responding. Avoid the pitfall of rushing into an answer without first thinking through your response.

A list of questions designed to give you an idea of the types of questions you can expect to be asked is included as Appendix A. Study it carefully and prepare to respond effectively to these and similar questions. In addition to these questions, applicants for teaching positions are encouraged to review a special listing of sample questions often asked of teaching candidates in Appendix B.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS: ANOTHER STYLE OF INTERVIEWING

Behavioral interviewing is a style of interviewing that has become increasingly popular among employers. Not all employers use this style of interviewing, but it is likely you will encounter behavioral interview questions sometime during your job search. Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. During a behavioral interview, an interviewer will ask questions to elicit real examples of your past performance in order to gain insights as to whether you will be successful in the position.

Before beginning to interview candidates, employers typically identify key characteristics of the position (e.g., communication, leadership, teamwork) and then structure questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining whether candidates possess the desired characteristics. Questions typically start with: “Describe a situation in which you...” or “Give an example of a time when...” By thoroughly researching the employer and requesting a detailed job description, you can better anticipate both the key characteristics and the types of questions that might be asked.

During a behavioral interview, you will need to provide an in-depth response by drawing upon your background, experience and knowledge of particular issues. Use the C.A.R. method to help you frame your response. That is:

C = Context

A = Action Taken

R = Results

Your responses to questions should provide the context (background) of a specific situation (the story), the actions you took, and the results you achieved. Your ability to provide appropriately detailed answers to interviewers' questions will give you a substantial advantage over candidates who give more general answers. Become a great storyteller during your interview, but be careful not to ramble. Here is an example:

Interview question: *Describe a recent situation in which you successfully persuaded others of your point of view.*

<u>C</u> ontext	In my public speaking class I was called upon to develop a brief impromptu presentation. I was asked to convince my peers in the class to agree to come in on a Saturday morning to hear outside speakers during a panel discussion. This was an actual upcoming event being sponsored by the Communication Department.
<u>A</u> ction Taken	I thought for a few minutes, developed my rationale, took a deep breath and stood up to speak to the class. I made a strong proposal and supported it with logical reasons, including the networking contacts we could make and the knowledge we would gain about jobs in our field. This was difficult to do, since most of us like to sleep in on Saturday if we can!
<u>R</u> esults	While I was not able to persuade everyone, roughly half the class came to the panel discussion that Saturday. My instructor said it was the best turnout she had ever had for this event. I believe my arguments had something to do with its success.

By using the C.A.R. method, you ensure that you are providing a thorough response. Be especially diligent in articulating the results! Don't be surprised if the interviewer probes further for more depth or detail. Finally, be careful—if you tell a story that is anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through a barrage of probing questions.

An excellent way to get ready for behavioral interviews is to prepare a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Identify six to eight examples from your past where you demonstrate key characteristics that employers typically seek. Think of examples from classes and school projects, activities, internships, athletic team participation, community service, hobbies, and/or work experiences. Also consider examples of any special accomplishments. Wherever possible, provide a measurable result (e.g., increased donations by 10% over last year). Since some questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations, you'll want to have one or two examples of negative experiences ready, but try to pick ones with positive outcomes or where you learned from the experience.

Appendix C contains sample behavioral interview questions listed under common key characteristics. Review these questions, especially the ones listed under the characteristics you believe are important for positions you seek. Don't try to memorize answers; instead prepare a mental outline to follow in responding to the questions. Behavioral interviews are challenging, but if you know what to expect and are prepared, you will be more confident and successful.

QUESTIONING THE INTERVIEWER

As important as it is to provide good answers to interviewers' questions, you must also be prepared to **ask** pertinent questions during the interviewing process. Many applicants mistakenly believe that they are evaluated solely on their response to interviewers' questions. In reality, candidates are also evaluated on the basis of the questions they **ask** during employment interviews.

Your questions should reflect a sincere interest in the organization and an awareness of the employer's needs and how you can fulfill them. Questions relating to salary and benefits should normally be avoided during initial screening interviews. Rather, these types of questions should be raised in subsequent interviews—after you and the employer have developed a greater degree of mutual interest. Don't scare off an interviewer by seeming to be overly concerned about salary, benefits, vacation time, etc. Examples of good questions to ask are located in Appendix D.

These questions should give you an idea of the types of queries employers expect candidates to make during employment interviews. Obviously, there will not be enough time to ask all—or even most—of these questions, so choose them wisely. Most importantly, ask the questions that are significant and relevant to you as you consider a particular employment opportunity. In any case, avoid asking questions that are adequately covered in the recruiting literature most companies provide. It is perfectly permissible to ask for clarification of information provided in recruiting literature, annual reports, and the like, but do not give the interviewer the impression you have not “done your homework” prior to the interview.

Likewise, if the interviewer appears pressed for time, do not prolong the interview by trying to fit in all your questions. There will probably be time to ask further questions during subsequent interviews and before you will need to respond to an offer of employment.

CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW

Most interviewers will conclude the interview by indicating when you can expect to receive further word on your status as an applicant. However, if the interviewer does not volunteer this information, be certain to ask. This will help you to follow up your interviews within a reasonable time frame. When employers are interviewing numerous candidates, your follow-up efforts will help distinguish you from less conscientious applicants. As a means of facilitating this follow-up process, ask the interviewer for one of his or her business cards and keep it handy for future reference. If the employer does not have a business card, write down his or her full name, title, address, and phone number for your records immediately after the interview.

HANDLING THE SALARY ISSUE

The topic of salary, as mentioned previously, will probably come up in your selection interviews. As part of your pre-interview search, investigate salary levels within your career field for similar positions. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers' *Salary Survey* will prove helpful. Both are available at our Career Library. Salary information may also be found online via the Career Services website, and in pertinent professional journals and various other publications in the reference sections of university and public libraries. In any event, have an appropriate salary range in mind based on your research prior to the interview, but don't get so bogged down on the salary issue that you give the employer the impression that you are more interested in salary than the opportunity at hand. Normally, there will be sufficient time to negotiate salary after the employment offer has been made.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

As a matter of courtesy, it is important to send your interviewer a short thank-you letter after the interview. Generally, all that is necessary is to thank the interviewer for his or her time and to express your ongoing interest in the position. If the interviewer indicated a specific time frame by which you should learn of your status as an applicant, be sure to mention that you are looking forward to hearing from him or her by this time.

As is the case with other types of employment correspondence, your thank-you letter should be neatly typewritten or handwritten to ensure a professional image. If you know that will be a quick hiring decision, you should send your thank-you letter in business format via email. Sample thank-you letters can be found in the *Cover Letters and Other Job-Search Correspondence Guide* available in our Career Library and via our website.

EVALUATING YOUR INTERVIEWS

Immediately following your interview, take some time to evaluate your performance. Consider the means you can use in future interviews to strengthen your effectiveness. Each interview should be a learning opportunity and an opportunity to profit from your experience. You will find that the more you interview, the better you become at effectively presenting your career interests and qualifications to employers.

However, if you consistently find yourself a victim of “dings in the mailbox,” consider some of the following factors:

- Have you set realistic job goals for yourself?
- Do you need to do your pre-interview research more thoroughly?
- Are you presenting yourself in the best possible manner?
- Does your resume reflect your career interests and support your claims? Does it represent the real you?
- Are you conveying an enthusiastic and well-informed interest in the position and an eagerness to learn?

Ultimately, as you evaluate your interviews, you will develop new skills in the entire process of interviewing. Besides being well-prepared, don't underestimate the importance of being enthusiastic. Highlight your qualifications and potential. Remember, the number one rule in any hiring situation is to convince the organization that you are worth more than they will be paying you. Be confident in yourself, and don't give up trying.

SECOND INTERVIEWS

Typically, employers who interview on campus include a second interview at their offices or facilities as a part of the hiring process. These interviews follow on-campus or screening interviews and are usually the last step in the process. They are designed so that the employer and candidate can get to know each other in more depth than is possible in the campus or screening interview. The objective of second interviews is to ensure that there is a good "fit" or "match" between you and the organization and position.

During these visits, you will learn more about the position, the employer's culture, long-term career opportunities, and the local community. You will experience a variety of formats for these second interviews. For example, the length of the interview visit will vary among different employers, and a variety of people will ask questions in both formal and informal sessions. In addition, these interviews can be given many names such as an office visit, plant visit, site visit, or fly-back.

It is important to maintain your professionalism at all times throughout your visit. Keep in mind that every employee you meet, from the person who picks you up at the airport, to the recent alumnus you meet at lunch, to the people with whom you formally interview, are evaluating your qualifications and "fit" for the position.

Since the most common way to be contacted is by phone, you will want to have a professional-sounding message left on your answering machine or voice-mailbox. You should also inform your roommates that you may be getting calls and ask that they take messages carefully and courteously.

- **Preparation.** The second interview is an important opportunity to collect information you will need to make a decision. Well in advance of the interview, you should prepare questions to ask and think about what to observe during your interview visit. The better you prepare, the more likely you will be to present yourself as an enthusiastic, mature, and interested candidate.

You should be very familiar with and up to date on information about the employer. This preparation might include a review of the organization's annual report, as well as any Internet-based resources, including the employer's website and other citations that may be found using various search engines. In addition, you may want to talk with a former student who works for the employer and/or faculty and Career Services staff members who may be familiar with the organization.

Finally, be sure not to overlook self-preparation, including appropriate travel and interview attire. Also be certain to review your activities, work experience, strengths, skills, and other qualifications that match what the employer is seeking.

- **Arrangements and Expenses.** Generally, there will be one primary contact to work with regarding arrangements. If possible, you should confirm the arrangements in writing, regardless of the method an employer used to contact you. Be sure to discuss who is paying for the trip. Most employers will reimburse you for all reasonable expenses, including transportation, meals, hotel, and parking. Normally, you will be expected to cover incidental expenses such as snacks, newspapers, souvenirs, in-room movies, etc. Most employers are willing to pre-pay travel and lodging expenses if you do not have a credit card or sufficient cash.

Visits are often at least one day long, so overnight accommodations may be necessary. Most times an employer will want to work around your schedule but will also appreciate your flexibility. Transportation may be by car or plane depending on the distance involved and your preference. The employer may make the arrangements or ask you to make them. If you make them, ask the employer for recommendations on airlines, hotels, and ground transportation, etc. The employer may suggest that you rent a car upon arrival. That is fine if you meet the minimum age requirement and have a major credit card, but you may not, so be certain to inquire about this to avoid embarrassment. It also shows that you plan ahead. Ask about any expense forms that need completion and keep any receipts. On occasion, a married student's spouse will be invited, but the employer should take the initiative in such cases. In any case, if you are responsible for making your own arrangements and aren't experienced at doing so, the services of a local travel agent may be helpful.

Be sure to confirm arrangements several days prior to your visit and get any necessary directions as well as the name and telephone number of your host. This will enable you to avoid any miscommunication. Keep your expenses within a reasonable range. Using common sense and good judgment is very important. Never double-charge two, or more employers for the same trip. Rather, prorate your expenses among employers visited on the same trip.

- **Arrival.** This will vary depending upon whether you are driving or flying, but it is a good idea to arrive in or near your destination the evening before the interview. If you fly, it is especially important that you confirm your flight a few days ahead of your visit. Simply telephone or check online with your travel agent or the airline to double-check the arrangements. A representative may meet you at the airport, or you might take a courtesy van or taxi. In either case, you should dress professionally—as you would for an interview. You may be going to dinner or to the employer's office before going to the hotel. If you drive, be sure to allow yourself plenty of time. Plan extra time for delays such as road construction or detours. You should also keep a record of your mileage and receipts for gasoline.

Upon arrival at the hotel, you should check for any messages. The employer may have left a packet of information for you to review prior to the interview. You may want to schedule a wake-up call for the next morning and verify the payment arrangements with the hotel. It is not a good idea to bill long-distance calls to the room. Use your cell phone.

The evening before the interview some organizations will schedule a dinner for you. It is advisable to avoid alcoholic beverages and maintain your professionalism. This dinner can serve many purposes. It will enable you to get an idea of what the next day will include concerning meetings, interviews, and the people involved. It enables you to relax and meet one or more employees. The dinner may include a recent hire, an alumnus/a from NKU, your key contact from the organization, a manager, or a combination of these or other people. Usually, the dinners are relaxed, but the people you are with will be evaluating your ability to converse, as well as your maturity, “fit” for the position and the organization, ideas and views on current issues, and social behavior. Remember that your primary goal should be to talk rather than eat. You can take your cues on menu selections from your host(s), but you should avoid ordering the most expensive items on the menu and foods that are difficult or messy to eat.

Following dinner, you should have enough time to prepare for the next day, including a review of the questions you want to ask and the research you did on the employer. You should also find out if you are to check out before departing the hotel, and what to do with your baggage.

- **Interviewing.** Your interview schedule will vary depending on the organization. As with the on-campus interview, it is very important to be yourself. Don't try to give the answer you think the interviewer wants to hear. It is common to have numerous interviews with various levels of employees. It could be a one-on-one or group setting. Each interviewer knows what he or she is looking for in a candidate. The types of people involved may include managers (staff, line, plant), human resources officials, recent alumni, your prospective immediate supervisor, and people in departments with whom you would work closely. You should be excited about the chance to talk to a variety of people, since it will give you a better understanding of the overall organization.

The interviewers will vary in terms of their ability to ask questions and conduct an interview. Some may be skilled communicators, some may be more technically oriented, and others may be relatively unprepared and may even ask inappropriate questions. Some employers allow the interviewers to develop their own questions with little coordination. Remember that the people you meet in the second interview may not be experienced interviewers. Their questions are probably not intended to be discriminatory. For more information about inappropriate questions, you may want to refer to Appendix E “How to Handle Improper or Illegal Interview Questions” at the back of this guide.

The questions asked may be very similar to those asked in the on-campus interview. You may also be asked the same question many times or you may be asked very different, but specific, questions by each person. They might be directed toward assessment of your skills and strengths (e.g., communication, leadership) as they relate to the position, or the questions may require you to communicate how you would handle or react to a given situation. You may also be asked to give an example of a situation and how you handled it (e.g., "Give me an example of a time when you experienced rejection and how you dealt with it"). Different interviewers may be assigned to go into depth about a specific skill or quality.

For example, one interviewer may ask several questions related to communication skills and another may inquire mostly about problem-solving or analytical skills. In addition, you may be asked to talk about an organization's products, services, status among competitors, recent news, etc. You may also be expected to participate in a group activity or work simulation.

Be sure to keep track of interviewer names and titles throughout the day. You may want to jot these down and check the spelling of their names with your primary contact before you leave. You might also want to ask for business cards after each interview.

- **Observing.** You should also think about, observe, and note various other aspects of the organization during your visit, including:
 - Are people professional and courteous to each other?
 - Are people positive or do they complain?
 - Do you enjoy the people?
 - What seems to be the work attitude (fun, serious)?
 - Building location, other tenants
 - Office furnishings and décor
 - Social events, civic activities, sports leagues, leisure activities organized through the employer
- **Tours.** Depending on the type of organization, you may be taken on a plant tour. Usually an employment manager or plant manager would conduct the tour and, while it is normally a relaxed time, you should be aware that you are still being evaluated. It is also very important to learn about the community in which you would be living and working. You may get a tour of the city or surrounding area during a second interview that will give you a feel for the community. You may also want to contact the Chamber of Commerce and request information on the area. Housing, cost of living, entertainment, and other personal interests as they relate to the community are important factors in your job satisfaction and should not be overlooked.
- **Testing.** An increasingly common part of the employment process is testing of some kind. This can include personality and interest inventories, mathematical and verbal tests, or drug tests. Many times, offers are contingent upon completion of these tests that can take place during a second interview. Usually there is not much preparation that can be done for these tests. With personality or interest inventories, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. You should answer questions honestly in order to give an accurate profile of yourself.

Drug tests have also become a standard part of the employment process. These tests usually take the form of a urine or blood sample that is analyzed for controlled substances. You should not be caught off guard if any of these tests are a part of your second interviews. In addition, you should keep in mind that failure to complete these tests might mean that you will not be considered further for employment.

- **Salary Discussions.** It is normally best to let employers take the initiative in bringing up the subject of salary. However, as mentioned earlier, you should research the field to find out the salary range you can expect. If questioned about salary, it is advisable to avoid giving an exact figure. Rather, you should indicate a broad salary range. This range should be based on your research. Another option is to simply indicate that you trust that if an offer is made, that it will be in line with your qualifications and the salary structure in the industry.

If you are seeking an entry-level position, you may have relatively little opportunity to negotiate your salary. Most employers, at least those of substantial size, have fairly standard salary packages for entry-level candidates. It is rare that these employers will deviate significantly from an established norm. However, some employers do include salary premiums for such things as previous internship or co-op experience, high academic achievement, etc. If in doubt about how the salary you are initially offered has been determined, simply ask the employer how the offer compares with offers being made to other entry-level candidates. This will open up an opportunity for you to mention any special “qualifiers” you may possess that may have been overlooked in the interviewing process. Also, ask when your performance and salary will be reviewed. It may well be that your salary will increase after you complete a formal or informal probationary period. In any case, if you engage in salary negotiations, strive for a “win-win” outcome and beware of the pitfalls of pushing too hard on the salary issue.

Keep in mind that an employer can increase the “value” of an offer to you in many ways, including a starting bonus, company car, commissions, an expense account, temporary housing during your move, moving expenses, interest-free loans, and others. You should also carefully evaluate the complete employee benefits package. Normally, employee benefit plans are described as part of the salary discussion, and literature detailing employee benefits is provided. In any case, be certain that you understand the benefits to which you would be entitled and how soon they would commence.

Some organizations make their offers during the second interview, but most need several days to several weeks to decide on candidates. Thus, it is important to find out about the hiring timetable. If delays occur, you should not hesitate to contact the employer and check on your status.

- **Follow-Up.** It is highly recommended that you send a letter of thanks to the primary contact person and possibly to other individuals you meet during the visit and interviews. This is a common courtesy and will certainly make you stand out above an average candidate. It is best to send this correspondence as soon as possible after your interview visit.

If you have additional questions about second interviews, please do not hesitate to schedule an appointment with a Career Services staff member.

NEED HELP?

If you need help with interviewing or any other aspect of the job-search or career-planning process, take advantage of the assistance available to you through Career Services. A variety of written resource materials are available in our Career Library. In addition, workshops on interviewing and the job-search process as well as a mock interview service are offered throughout the year.

CAREER SERVICES WEBSITE

For additional information about Career Services, please refer to our website at:
<https://nku.edu/careerservices>.

Appendix A

GENERAL SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

What are your major strengths/weaknesses?

Why should I hire you over other candidates?

What kind of professors did you like?

Do you work well under pressure? How do you handle it?

What have you done to show initiative and innovation?

What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?

What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences?

Why did you decide to interview with us?

Why are your grades low? Do they reflect your ability?

What do you know about our organization?

What interests you about this specific position?

What qualifications do you have that make you feel you would be successful?

What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?

What is not on your resume that you would like to tell me?

What have you read recently?

In what school activities have you participated? Why?

Which school activities did you enjoy the most?

How did you spend your vacations while in school?

If you were starting college all over again, what would you do differently?

Do you think your extracurricular activities were worth the time you devoted to them? Why?

What are your long-range/short-range goals? How do you plan to achieve them?

What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?

If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?

Why did you select NKU?

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?

What types of positions are you considering?

What would be your ideal job?

Why did you select your particular major?

Appendix B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES

Describe the courses you most enjoyed at NKU, and explain why.

Why do you want to be a teacher?

Why have you chosen to interview with our school system?

What is your philosophy of education?

Describe your previous work experience and how it will relate to your work as a teacher.

Describe your theory of curriculum development and how you would implement a new curriculum.

What is your philosophy of classroom management?

How would you evaluate your performance in the classroom?

How would you like your students to describe you at the end of the school year?

How would you like your teaching colleagues to describe you at the end of the school year?

What is the greatest asset you will bring to your classroom and to your profession?

What extracurricular activities do you feel you could supervise in our school system?

What skills do you think an excellent teacher should possess?

In addition to becoming a successful teacher, what are your other goals?

How would you organize your classroom in order to teach the entire class, yet provide individualized instruction?

How would you approach the problem of students who have not mastered basic reading / writing skills?

What have you done recently to overcome one of your weaknesses?

What are your interests and hobbies outside the school setting?

What are the primary professional associations for your field?

What are your plans for future professional growth and development?

What are some of the current issues in regard to teaching and education?

How would you respond to a parent who is upset with your teaching methods or with your treatment of his or her child?

How would you describe the "ideal" principal? What assets should he or she have that will help your performance as a teacher?

How much do you intend to involve the administration with regard to problems, conflicts, and/or suggestions in the classroom?

Why should I give you further consideration as opposed to other candidates?

What would you like to add to this information that will help me remember you as a teaching candidate?

Do you have a portfolio of some of your lesson plans, activities, projects, etc. that I may see?

Appendix C

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

MOTIVATION

- Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
- Tell me about a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION

- Describe how you handle having your schedule suddenly interrupted.
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Give me an example when you were unable to complete a project on time.

DECISION MAKING

- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- Describe a difficult decision you made in the past six months. What made it difficult?
- Tell me about a time when you made a bad decision.

LEADERSHIP

- Tell me about a time when you had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas. What was your approach?
- Give an example of your ability to build motivation in your co-workers, classmates, or other group members.
- Describe the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from. How did you handle it?

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively “read” another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their needs and values.

INITIATIVE

- Describe a situation when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
- Give me examples of projects/tasks you started on your own.
- Tell me about a time when you surmounted a major obstacle.

COMMUNICATION

- Describe your most significant written document, report, or presentation which you had to complete.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across.
- Give an example of a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone’s opinion.

TEAMWORK

- Tell me about a team experience you found rewarding.
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What could you have done to prevent this?

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Tell me about a time you were creative in solving a problem.
- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed with which you did not agree.
- Describe an instance when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.

Appendix D

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?

Could you describe a typical first-year assignment?

Could you tell me about your initial and future training programs?

Do you have in-house professional development seminars? If so, what topics are typically covered?

What are some of the typical career paths followed by others who have been in this position? What is a realistic time frame for advancement?

How is an employee evaluated and promoted?

What are the opportunities for personal growth?

What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?

What are the most challenging facets of the position?

What are your expectations for new hires?

What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?

What is the work environment like?

How often can I expect to relocate during the initial years of employment with your company?

What are the organization's plans for future growth?

Is the organization stable and financially sound?

What assurance about employment stability can I expect?

Is it company policy to promote from within? What is the work history of your top management?

What distinguishes your firm from its competitors?

What industry-wide trends are likely to affect your organization?

What are your company's strengths and weaknesses?

How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?

How is the work environment affected by the company's management style?

If you were to name three values this organization represents, what would they be?

Why should I want to work for your organization instead of another?

Why did you join and stay with the firm?

What do you like about working for this organization? What don't you like?

Appendix E

HOW TO HANDLE IMPROPER OR ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

During an interview, you expect and are prepared to answer questions that relate to the job and how well your qualifications, skills and interests fit the position. Consequently, it can be very disconcerting to be asked an interview question about your private life, marriage or family plans, or related personal matters. Personal questions in interviews are at best improper and at worst illegal. Questions about personal matters may not be illegal per se, but employers risk violating Equal Employment Opportunity laws by broaching certain topics, even in casual conversation. These laws prohibit employers from discriminating in hiring on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age or disability. However, the laws do not specifically indicate questions that cannot be asked.

Why Might an Employer Ask an Illegal Question?

Employment laws have changed in recent years. Sometimes it is difficult for employers to keep up with new developments in this area. They may not know it is unacceptable to ask certain questions. Also, some recruiters may not have received extensive training in personnel practices. Employers may have legitimate concerns about reliability, dependability, willingness to travel or relocate, but may not have been trained in how to assess these issues through appropriate questions. It is expensive to hire and train a new employee only to have him or her leave the job in a short time because of conflicts with personal or family responsibilities and obligations. Thus, employers legitimately want to reduce the likelihood of untimely turnover of new employees.

While you may justifiably feel offended, frustrated or even angry when asked an illegal question, you do not want to overreact, especially if you are genuinely interested in the job. In fact, handling the issue in a professional manner will be a credit to you.

How Should You Respond if You are Asked an Improper Question?

An article in an issue of the college edition of the *National Business Employment Weekly* by James M. Jenks, suggests three alternatives on how to respond when you feel the interviewer has asked an illegal question:

- **You Can Refuse to Answer** — tell the employer you think the question is improper. Using this response may make you feel better, but chances are you will not get the job.
- **You Can Answer the Question as Asked** — swallow your pride to stay in the running for the job.
- **You Can Answer the Legitimate Concern of the Employer** — ignore the improper question itself, and respond instead to the concern underlying the question.

The third choice allows you to present yourself in a positive manner and control the way you answer the question. You might want to rephrase the question or simply ignore it and answer the issue behind the question. You can address an interviewer's reservations directly, correct erroneous assumptions about the real issue of concern, and resolve it. For example, if an interviewer asked a male student, "How would you feel about working for a woman?" a good response would be: "I've worked effectively with both women and men on several projects. I would have no problem working for either as my supervisor." This response reflects that you understand the employer's concern from their point of view, and by relating your answer to job performance, you may be able to turn the question into a plus.

The following are some improper questions and sample responses:

Q: Are you planning to get married soon? (or, Do you have a serious boyfriend / girlfriend?)

A: If you are concerned about my staying in the area or my ability to travel, I can assure you that I am looking forward to living in this area and travel has always been part of my job expectations.

Q: What do your parents do? (Sometimes asked to find out how many contacts you might have for a sales job, typically in financial services.)

A: I'm not sure how this relates to this job. Can you explain?

Q: Do you plan to have children? (Sometimes asked of women candidates.)

A: Regardless of whether I have children, my career will always be an important part of my life.

Q: Where were you born? (Sometimes asked of international students.)

A: I am a permanent resident of the United States and have a legal permit to work.

-or-

A: I have an F1 (or J1) visa and can obtain practical training experience before returning home. (The concern is about your work eligibility and you should respond to that concern.)

Q: Have you ever been arrested other than for traffic violations?

A: I have never done anything that would give your organization cause for concern about my honesty or personal integrity. (It is illegal to ask if you have been arrested. An individual might have been arrested, but not convicted of a crime. In some states, employers are allowed to ask if you have been convicted of any crime. If you were arrested for a minor charge, you might respond to the question assuming that the unstated concern is about your moral character.)

If you feel there are sensitive areas for you, be prepared to answer them before you go into the interview. Make a list of possible responses and practice your answers so they will feel natural.

Remember, an interview is not a causal conversation. Just because the interview may be winding up and the interviewer shares personal information with you, you are not obliged to reveal anything in your personal life to them. A luncheon interview is still an interview, and you will be evaluated on your responses even though the setting may seem more casual.

If an interviewer consistently asks improper questions, you might want to think twice about working for that organization. The Career Services staff would like to know if you experience what you consider to be illegal or improper questions in a campus interview. Career Services certainly does not condone such unprofessional conduct, so notifying us will allow us to pursue the matter with the employer.

Lastly, questions that were inappropriate before the hire, such as date of birth, marital status, etc., may be perfectly legal after you are hired. Employers often need such information for tax, insurance, Social Security and other such purposes.

Although we have tried to highlight some common improper questions and appropriate responses, this information is not intended to cover all possible areas where illegal questions or discrimination might be an issue. If you need additional information about this subject, call Career Services for an appointment with a career advisor.