

INTERVIEWING GUIDE



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General Information

What is an Interview?

An interview is an opportunity for applicants and employers to evaluate the fit between the applicant's qualifications and the position being considered. It is not designed to be a process of interrogation but rather a mutual exchange of information based on two-way communication.

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.

Objectives of the Interview:

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

Types of Interviews

Broadly speaking, there are two basic types of interviews: screening interviews and selection interviews.

1. The **screening interview** is usually rather general and is relatively short (often 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 may also be conducted by phone or via videoconferencing software such as Skype. Once screening interviews have been conducted, it is typical for a portion of the candidates to be invited to the employer's office or facility for a second, more detailed interview.
2. 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 facility 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. Not only will you be presenting yourself and your qualifications, but you will also 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.



TIP: Since the most common way to be contacted for an interview is by phone, you will want to have a professional-sounding message on your voicemail.

Interview Preparation

Most candidates interviewing for a given position will have the basic qualifications necessary to do that job. However, it is typically the candidates who do the best job of **presenting** themselves who get job offers. 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.

Think about how your interests, skills, education, experiences, and values fit in with the type of organization and position for which you are being interviewed.

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 their website and other online news sources. 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. 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.

Practicing.

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.

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. Know your general points and supporting examples; allow them to come together as the questions are asked.



TIP: Career Services has two great ways to practice your interview skills. InterviewStream is an online mock interview system that is accessible through one.nku.edu. To schedule an in-person mock interview with Career Services staff, call us at 859-572-5680 or stop by University Center 225.

Interviewing Basics

Your interview, and your chance to make a positive first impression, begins long before you answer your first interview question. To get your interview off to a great start, consider the following suggestions:

Dress appropriately

A properly fitting **business suit** in a classic color is recommended. If in doubt, dress up. Distracting jewelry, nail polish, makeup, or perfume/cologne should be avoided. All clothing should be pressed and clean; hair, nails, and facial hair should be neatly groomed. A good appearance reinforces your many positive attributes! Additional professional dress tips are available on our website.

Be punctual

Never be late for an interview! Your first opportunity to make a favorable impression on the interviewer is to be punctual. Try to arrive early enough (10-15 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 and where to park. Upon arrival for your interview, greet the employer's receptionist and/or administrative staff courteously and with respect. First impressions really count!

Handle introductions properly

The introductions between you and your interviewer are an important part of 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 current events 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.

Prepare your materials

Bring copies of your resume, list of references, academic transcript, and a notepad and pen in a professional portfolio or folder. Your list of references should indicate their names, titles, addresses, and telephone numbers. If appropriate (as in the case of advertising, journalism, art, or education), bring a portfolio containing samples or illustrations of your work.



TIP: Building your professional wardrobe can take time and money, but there are cost-effective places to shop for an interview suit and business professional clothing. Try shopping at outlets, discount stores, and consignment shops for more reasonably priced clothing. See our *Professional Clothing Guide* handout on our website for more information.

Types of Interview Questions

There are four main types of questions you will face in an interview: direct, open-ended, behavioral, and company-specific. Below, we explore each of these types of questions and examples of each.

Direct Questions

These questions are focused, straight forward and related to the job. For example, “Which computer programming languages do you have experience using?” or “What leadership experience do you have?”

Open-ended Questions

These questions are broad and usually help the interviewer to better understand you as a person and as a potential employee. Some common examples include, “Tell me about yourself,” and “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Behavioral Questions

These questions seek to understand your past behaviors as a predictor of future results by asking for specific, real examples or stories. For example, “Tell me about a time when you handled an upset customer,” or “Describe a situation when you went above and beyond what was required of you.”

Company-specific Questions

These questions will be directly related to the organization. Examples include, “Tell me what you know about our organization,” or “Why do you want to work for ABC Company?”



TIPS: Appendix A includes a list of more questions designed to give you an idea of the types of questions you can expect to be asked. Study it carefully and prepare to respond effectively to these and similar questions.

A list of sample behavioral interview questions is included as Appendix B. These sample questions have been organized by categories, such as leadership and problem solving. Consider the nature of the job for which you are interviewing, and practice questions from relevant categories.

It is impossible to know exactly what questions you will be asked during an interview, but understanding the types of questions that are common and practicing your answers to them will help you feel more prepared and confident.

Responding to Interview Questions

The majority of the interview time is typically devoted to the employer asking you questions; it is the heart of the interview. Below, we consider best practices for answering interview 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, they probably really want to know whether you have given thoughtful consideration to the skills and abilities necessary to succeed within their organization. Put yourself in the employer's frame of reference and respond as directly as possible. Your goal is to put yourself in the best possible light and lessen any reservations the employer may have about your suitability for employment.

Remember to be yourself and focus on your positive assets.

If there are periods in your past that are difficult to explain, do not dwell on them. Respond to the interviewer's questions 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."



TIPS: When asked "**Tell me about yourself,**" answer with your education, experience, and passions relating to the job. Do not give your entire life history!

As much as possible, provide details and relevant examples, such as job experiences, pertinent hobbies, travel, positions 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 your answer brief so that you don't lose the interviewer's attention.

When asked about your **weaknesses** or opportunities for growth, be authentic and self-aware, and conclude with the steps you're taking to improve this weakness. Avoid mentioning things that would hurt your chances of being hired. Be careful about weaknesses that are also strengths, such as caring too much or working too hard, which may seem like non-answers.

Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral interview questions often begin with “Tell me a time when...” prompts. The interviewer wants you to share a real experience you’ve had that helps them better understand your approach to specific workplace situations, such as dealing with a difficult customer or taking initiative.

Anticipating what you’ll be asked

It is impossible to predict every question an interviewer will ask you, but you can make an educated guess by thinking about the aspects of the role for which you are interviewing. Is this a customer-facing role? You will probably be asked about customer service or communication. Is sales an aspect of this role? If so, then expect a question about persuading others. By researching the employer and requesting a detailed job description, you can better anticipate the type of questions that might be asked.

Appendix B contains sample behavioral interview questions grouped under common key characteristics. Review these questions, especially the ones listed under the characteristics you believe are important for positions you seek.

Preparing positive examples

An excellent way to prepare for behavioral questions is to think of a few example stories that can be adapted to many different questions. Identify six to eight examples from your past where you positively demonstrate key characteristics that employers typically seek, such as leadership, communication, and problem solving.

These examples don’t always come from work experience. Also think of examples from class projects, activities, internships, athletic team participation, community service and/or hobbies that allow you to demonstrate a moment when you really shined!

Addressing a negative question

Nobody is perfect, and sometimes interviewers want to know how you handle failure or setbacks in life. In addition to the positive stories you’ve gathered, you’ll also want to have one or two examples of negative experiences ready. As with any interview question that exposes weaknesses or negativity, try to pick examples with positive outcomes or where you learned from the experience.

Behavioral interviews are challenging, but if you know what to expect and are prepared, you will be more confident and successful!



TIP: Don’t try to memorize answers; instead prepare a mental outline to follow in responding to the questions.

The C.A.R. Method

Telling a compelling story

Your responses to behavioral interview questions should provide the **C**ontext (background) of a specific situation, the **A**ctions you took, and the **R**esults you achieved. By using the C.A.R. method, you ensure that you are providing a thorough response without rambling.

While your answers shouldn't be too long, they also shouldn't be too brief. You want to strike a balance between being succinct and providing important details. Your ability to provide appropriately detailed answers to interviewers' questions will give you a substantial advantage over candidates who give more general answers. Here is an example:

Interview Question:

Describe a situation in which you successfully persuaded others to see your point of view.

Interviewee Response:

<u>C</u>ontext	In my public speaking class I was asked to develop an impromptu persuasive presentation. I was asked to convince my peers in the class to agree to come in on a Saturday morning to hear 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.



TIP: Be especially diligent in explaining your actions and the results! Don't be surprised if the interviewer probes further for more depth or detail. But be careful—if you tell a story that is anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through further questions.

Selection Interviews

Selection, or second, interviews are typically held at the organization's office or facility and are usually the last step in the interviewing 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.

Assessing "fit"

The objective of second interviews is to ensure that there is a good "fit" between you and the organization and position. During these visits, you will learn and observe more about the position and the employer's culture. The interviewers will be assessing your fit in their organization, but you should also consider how well you would fit there.

Reflect on the following questions:

- Do you enjoy the people here?
- What seems to be the work attitude? Positive?
- Are people respectful and professional?
- Can you see yourself enjoying your work here?

Interviewing with multiple people

During your second interview, it is common to have numerous interviews with various levels of employees, which could be in a one-on-one or group setting. The types of people involved may include managers, human resources officials, recent alumni, your prospective immediate supervisor, and people in departments with whom you would work closely. Having the chance to speak to a variety of people will give you a better understanding of the overall organization.

Additional Preparation

Before going into a second interview, take the time to do some additional, in-depth preparation. Here are a few things to do:

- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer, using Appendix C as a guide
- Be very familiar with and up to date on information about the employer
- Explore the employer's website and social media presence
- Search for relevant news about the employer
- 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
- Confirm your meeting time and place with your primary contact several days prior to your interview
- Review driving directions to interview site and identify parking options, if needed
- Pick out appropriate interview attire
- Review your activities, work experience, strengths, skills, and other qualifications that match what the employer is seeking
- If you are going to an interview out of town, see Appendix D for information on how to handle the arrangements, expenses, and arrival with long distance travel.

Concluding the Interview

Questioning the interviewer

As important as it is to provide good answers to interviewers' questions, you must also be prepared to ask relevant questions during the interviewing process. In most cases, 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. Don't bring up salary or benefits unless they do. Examples of good questions to ask are located in Appendix C.

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 a business card and keep it handy for future reference. If the employer does not have a business card, write down their full name, title, address, email address, and phone number for your records immediately after the interview.

Thanking the interviewer

As a matter of courtesy, it is important to send your interviewer a short thank-you letter within 24 hours after the interview. Because hiring decisions can happen quickly, these letters are usually sent by email, but they can be typed or hand-written and mailed to the interviewer(s). A well-written thank-you letter will:

- Remind the employer who you are
- Impress him or her with your courtesy and follow-through
- Remind the employer of your background and qualifications
- Show your enthusiasm and continued interest in the field or specific position discussed
- Convey to the employer your sincere appreciation for his or her time and consideration

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.



TIPS: Did you interview with more than one person? Get business cards from each interviewer, and send a separate thank-you letter to each person.

For an example of a thank-you letter, see our *Cover Letter & Job-Search Letters Guide*.

Salary and Benefit Considerations

Bringing up salary

It is normally best to let employers take the initiative in bringing up the subject of salary. Questions relating to salary and benefits should be avoided during the initial screening interview unless brought up by the employer. Rather, these types of questions are more often discussed in second/selection interviews—after you and the employer have developed a greater degree of mutual interest or you have received a job offer.

Before going into an interview situation, you should research the field to find out the salary range you can expect. The online *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, and the National Association of Colleges and Employers' *Salary Survey* are good resources to learn reasonable salary expectations. Also see websites such as salary.com and payscale.com.

Negotiating salary

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.

Looking beyond salary

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 and moving expenses (if relocating), tuition reimbursement, 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 begin.



TIPS: If questioned about salary, it is advisable to avoid giving an exact figure. Rather, you should indicate a broad salary range based on your research.

Don't scare off an interviewer by seeming to be overly concerned about salary, benefits, and vacation time early in the interview process.

Additional Considerations

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.

Evaluating Your interviews

Immediately following your interview, take some time to evaluate your performance. Each interview should be a learning opportunity and a beneficial 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 being overlooked by employers, consider 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?
- Are you utilizing Career Services mock interviews and/or InterviewStream to practice your interview skills and receive feedback for how to improve?

Ultimately, as you evaluate your interviews, you will develop new skills in the process of interviewing. 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.

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 other employers are you interviewing with?
- What types of positions are you considering?
- What would be your ideal job?
- Why did you select your particular major?

Appendix B

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Motivation

- Tell me a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.

Planning and Organizing

- Describe how you handle having your schedule suddenly interrupted.
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.

Decision Making

- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- 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.

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.

Communication

- 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.
- Describe an instance when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.

Appendix C

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 D

Tips for Long Distance Interviews

Arrangements and Expenses

- Determine your 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. If you are travelling to an interview, employers may reimburse you for your transportation, meals, hotel, and parking. Alternately, employers may be willing to pre-pay travel and lodging expenses if you do not have a credit card or sufficient cash. Ask about any expense forms that need completion and keep any receipts.
- 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, 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.
- Visits can be at least one full day, so overnight accommodations may be necessary. Most times an employer will want to work around your schedule but will also appreciate your flexibility. On occasion, a married student's spouse will be invited, but the employer should take the initiative in such cases.
- 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. 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.

Appendix E

How to Handle Improper or Illegal Interview Questions

During an interview, you are expected to answer questions that relate to the job and your qualifications for the position. It can be very alarming to be asked an interview question about your private life or personal matters. Questions about personal matters may not be illegal per se, but employers risk violating Equal Employment Opportunity laws by mentioning certain topics, even in casual conversation. These laws prohibit employers from discriminating in hiring on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age, disability or genetic information; however, the laws do not specifically indicate questions that cannot be asked.

Why Might an Employer Ask an Illegal Question?

- Employment laws change frequently. Sometimes it is difficult for employers to keep up with new developments in this area
- 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
- Employers legitimately want to reduce the likelihood of untimely turnover of new employees. 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

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.

Appendix E, continued

The following are some improper questions and sample responses:

Q: Are you planning to get married soon?

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: Do you plan to have children?

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

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: 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?

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.)



TIPS: 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.

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.

If an interviewer consistently asks improper questions, you might want to think twice about working for that organization. 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 does not condone such unprofessional conduct, so notifying us will allow us to pursue the matter with the employer.

Although we have tried to highlight some 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.

Successful Interview Checklist

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Know Yourself:** what do you have to offer; knowledge, skills, and abilities; your goals
- Research the Company:**
 - What questions will you ask the interviewer? (See Appendix C)
 - Learn as much as you can about the company beforehand
 - Ask the recruiter for a list of people you'll meet, learn about them on LinkedIn, and prepare some questions that are specific to each interviewer.
- Practice Your Interviewing Skills:**
 - Practice alone and with family and friends
 - Practice using InterviewStream and/or a mock interview in Career Services

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- First Impressions:**
 - Be prompt and prepared; arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview
 - Have printed documents (extra copies of resume, academic transcript, list of references, your questions for the interviewer)
 - Dress appropriately (including having your clothing pressed, shoes polished, and attention to personal grooming)
 - Give a firm handshake with a smile and a good introduction
- Questions and Answers:**
 - Answer the interviewers' questions thoroughly, yet concisely (CAR method)
 - Ask questions
 - Be yourself and focus on your positive qualities

CONCLUSION/AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Leave a Positive Impression:**
 - Be prepared with your closing statement expressing interest
 - Ask the interviewer for a business card
 - Thank the interviewer
- Follow-Up:** Send a short thank-you note (email or handwritten)
- Evaluate:** Critique yourself (were you prepared, what would you do differently, did you present yourself in the best possible manner, etc.)