

# Interview Tips – CareerLAB GRAD

## ONE: Remember The Purpose of the Interview

Employers use interviews to evaluate three things:

1. Do you have the academic background, technical qualifications, and skills to do the job?
2. Do you have the personal characteristics and competencies necessary for the job?
3. Are you a good fit with the organization?
- 4.

In most cases, an interviewer has already decided from your resume that you meet the first criteria, though he or she may have additional questions about your background. The answers to questions two and three can usually be gained only through an interview.

## TWO: Start With the Basics

When preparing for your interview, remember the 4 R's:

**Research** — Gather information about the position, organization, and field through company websites, job descriptions, annual reports, trade journals, newspapers, magazines, etc.

**Review & Relate** — Your best guide to the skills and qualities necessary for a specific job is the job description. Review your experience and skills, and draw connections between your background and the position's description. Identify specific examples that highlight your relevant skills. Download and complete the [Résumé/Cover Letter/Interview Prep Sheet](#) from the CareerLAB website.

**Rehearse** — Practice responses to questions you may be asked, try your responses out with a friend, or schedule a practice interview at the Career LAB. Visit [Handshake](#) to schedule. The goal is not to memorize answers (which will make you *sound* rehearsed), but to gain confidence in discussing your strengths and experience in an interview situation.

Interviewing is stressful, and it's easy to forget the basics when you're nervous.

- Smile, make eye contact, and give a firm handshake.
- Be alert. Show enthusiasm and energy.
- Take time answering. Momentary pauses to collect your thoughts are okay.
- If at all possible, do not write anything down until after the interview is over.
- Be prepared to ask questions that demonstrate your enthusiasm for and interest in the position, the organization, and the career field.
- Do not ask about salary.
- At the conclusion of the interview, ask about the next steps, the time frame, and for a business card.
- Send an email thank you note within 24 hours.

## **THREE: Three Basic Questions and How to Answer Them**

- You'll be asked three basic questions in any interview:
- Why are you interested in this field?
- Why are you interested in this position and organization?
- What relevant skills and experience do you have that will make you a successful employee?

Be prepared to answer these questions with specific information:

- Link your skills and experience to the qualifications and job description the employer included in the job posting.
- Illustrate your answers with short stories.
- Give concrete examples to back your claims about your skills and experience.

## **FOUR: Other Common Interview Topics/Questions**

### **Personal**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- Why should we hire you?

### **Education**

- Why did you choose to study at Brown?
- Describe your major paper/project.

### **Career Goals**

- What are your future career goals?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5 years, 10 years?

### **Knowledge of the Organization**

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What kind of work environment is comfortable for you?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- How can you make a contribution to our organization?

### **Experience**

- How does your Brown education or work experience relate to this job?
- Give me an example of your X skills (e.g. writing).
- What experience do you have working on a team?

## **FIVE: Tell me About Yourself - The Dreaded Open-ended #PROMPT**

“Tell me about yourself” is an open-ended question that tests how well you can focus. Your response should demonstrate how your past experiences, skills, and interests would contribute to the position and organization.

Use this 90-second guideline when answering this question:

Focus on your academic experience (e.g. what you are studying, major research projects).

Focus on relevant experiences and skills that you bring.

Focus on your interest in the position (given the background you just discussed).

**Give highlights of your experiences and focus your answer.** This is not the time to elaborate. You can ask if the interviewer would like more information or clarification.

## **Behavior Based Interviewing**

Behavior-based interviewing is built on the premise that past behavior predicts future performance. Instead of asking how you *would* behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you *did* behave. Develop short narratives for each question below. Focus on positive outcomes, quantifiable results, and qualitative improvements.

For instance, an interviewer might prompt or ask you something like the following:

- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Describe a time when you successfully balanced several competing priorities.
- Give an example of a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you didn't agree.
- Tell me about a time when you persuaded team members to do things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a difficult situation with a co-worker
- Describe the most significant written document or report or presentation you have had to complete.
- Describe a specific occasion in which you were creative in solving a problem.
- Give an example of a time in which you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or peers.
- Talk about a time when you were faced with a difficult decision and describe how it turned out

## **SIX: Ask Questions**

The questions below demonstrate your enthusiasm and interest in an opportunity. Develop additional questions based on your research about the position, the organization, its competitors, as well as your own interests and priorities.

- What are the most important responsibilities of the position?
- What are the priorities over the next year?
- What is the greatest challenge currently facing this department or organization?
- What kind of supervision or training is provided?
- What type of person succeeds in this position? Organization?
- What type of feedback (reviews) can I expect? Frequency?
- How would you describe the organizational culture?

- Tell me about your own experience with this organization. What do you enjoy most/least about working here?
- What is the next step in the interview process? What is your time frame? (You should not leave the interview without getting the answer to this question.)
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## **SEVEN: TIPS FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

- **Location Matters** – Try to conduct the interview on a land line. If you must interview on a cell phone, find a location that gets great cell service and that will be quiet at the time of the call.
- **Find a Comfortable Position** – When phone interviewing, you should stand or sit. Do not lie down.
- **Limit the paperwork** – Have your resume in front of you, but don't shuffle through papers as you answer questions. Your answers should come naturally.
- **Don't Ramble** – Applicants have a tendency to ramble in phone interviews because they have no visual cues that the listener gets their point. Be succinct.
- **Smile** – Although you can't be seen, smiles can be "heard". It's important to come across as pleasant.