

Preparing for the Job Interview

Interview Process

The three parts of the interview process include:

Part 1: Before the Interview

Part 2: During the Interview

Part 3: After the Interview

Part 1: Before the Interview

Review any documentation provided by the interviewer – this could include:

- letters
- memos
- interview questions
- competencies
- position description
- duties

Research the organization/agency

- mission statement
- vision statement
- operational plan
- organizational chart

Preparing interview responses and practice

If questions are provided ahead of time, take time to prepare responses. Ask someone to review your responses and give you feedback. Practice your responses by yourself and then in front of others. The more you practice, the more comfortable you should feel during the interview.

If the questions are not provided ahead of time, prepare by responding to common interview questions, by reviewing your skills, work experience, strengths, development areas. Think of examples that align with the competencies or the duties of the position for which you are applying.

Types of Questions

- Theoretical or Situational Questions - The candidate is presented with a situation and asked how they would respond.
- Behavioral – The candidate is asked how you DID behave in a situation, versus how you WOULD behave.
- Basic Non-Behavioral Questions – Usually are closed-ended questions. Asks the candidate specific questions that can be answered more concisely and quickly.
- Hypothetical - “What if...”
- Leading Questions - tells the interviewee what the interviewer wants to hear.

Types of Questions - Examples

- “*What would you do if a customer was yelling at you?*” - Theoretical/Situational
- “*Describe a time where you led a group of people on a team to complete a major project?*” - Behavioral
- “*What computer software are you comfortable with?*” - Basic Non-Behavioral
- “*If your boss was upset with you, how would you handle that?*” - Hypothetical
- “*We need motivated people in our organization. Are you motivated?*” - Leading

Factors Considered When Selecting

There are many factors that an employer/selecting official consider when selecting a person for a position. The application and resume, the interview, references and other items may all be considered in the decision.

Some specific factors employers examine are your skills, abilities, knowledge areas, personal attributes, experience, and education and/or training that are essential for success in the target position.

Factors – Definitions and Examples:

- Knowledge - job specific knowledge a candidate has that meets the requirements. Examples include knowledge of rules and regulations, specific machinery systems and specifications, data bases, or agriculture crops.
- Abilities and Skills – job specific abilities and skills a candidate has that meets the requirements.

Some examples include planning and organizing, interpersonal skills, personal computer operations, mental ability, delegation, control, and leadership.

- Personality Attributes - distinguishing qualities or characteristics that are part of who a person is. Examples included initiative, work standards, discipline, reliability, and adaptability.
- Competencies - An observable, measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, or characteristics an individual needs for effective or superior performance in a job. The APHIS Leadership Development Toolkit lists and describes all the competencies needed for all levels of employees in APHIS. Examples include honesty/integrity, written communication, and customer service.

Techniques for Preparing for Interview Questions

There are a number of techniques that can be used to prepare responses to interview questions. Two techniques that can be used in preparing specific responses to questions are known as “STAR” and “EAR”. Additionally, a technique known as “MATTER” can be used to guide thinking in formulating responses.

STAR

Situation: What was the Situation in which you were involved?

Tasks: What was the Task you needed to accomplish?

Actions: What Actions did you take?

Results: What Results did you achieve?

EAR

Event: What was going on and what was the situation?

Action: Action or activity – what did you do and/or say?

Result: What happened as a result of what you did or said?

MATTER

Motivation - What gets you excited about your work?

Ambition - Where do you want to go in your career?

Technical - What technical skills do you bring to the job?

Theoretical/Hypothetical – “What if...?”

Energy - What keeps you going each day?

Relationships - How do you fit within the organization, its culture, and its mix of people?

Additional Preparations

- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer. It is important to prepare 2-3 questions to ask the interviewer(s). The questions should be based on your research and related to the job duties, requirements, and the organization.
- Select the appropriate dress attire for the interview.
- Confirm directions to the interview location and contact information.

*If you have any questions or concerns, contact the person you set up the interview with or the selecting official to ask interview related questions. For example, ask about what you should wear, what you need to prepare ahead of time, what you should bring with you - **Contact the agency before the interview.***

Assessment Methods Used by Employers

Some jobs may require the person hired have specific skills or background. In some cases, employers may require candidates complete assessments to measure those specific skill or check background. Assessment methods may include the following:

- Tests - Intelligence, aptitude, integrity, knowledge.
- Inventories - personality, interests, values, attitudes, opinions.
- Simulations - used individually or in the context of an assessment center.
- Physical Fitness - where appropriate and if applicable.
- Background checks - previous employment history.

Types of Interviews

- Structured or patterned
- Behavioral
- Unstructured

The Structured Interview

Organized

Predetermined questions

Step-by-step approach

For the structured interview, more preparation is involved by the interviewer and candidate and the interviews are more organized. Sometimes, interviewees are provided the questions ahead of time. In PPQ, you may or may not receive the questions and or competencies ahead of time.

If you do receive questions ahead of time, it is important to prepare for the interview based on the questions and competencies you received before the interview.

The Behavioral Event Interview (BEI)

A BEI is a structured interview, but not all structured interviews are BEI interviews. A BEI is usually conducted by a panel of interviewers. BEI questions solicit real-life experiential responses that provide a way to evaluate skills, knowledge and behaviors. The candidate's responses are a true indicator of how they will behave and perform in future work-related situations. Candidates need to be able to respond in detail to address the questions thoroughly.

There may be anywhere from 3-8 people on the panel. The people and positions may vary, but may include the following:

- Direct supervisor for the vacant position.
- Other supervisors and managers.
- Human resources personnel and Equal Employment Opportunity representatives.
- Other employees.
- A Union representative.

Unstructured Interview

Few or no predetermined steps or questions

Free flowing

The interviewer and candidates engage in a formal interview in that they have a scheduled time to sit and speak with each other and both parties recognize this to be an interview. The interviewer builds rapport with the candidate and questions tend to be open-ended. The unstructured interview allows for spontaneity and for questions to develop during the interview process.

Types of Interview Structures

- Panel Interview – 3 to 8 people as a group interviewing one candidate at a time.
- One-on-One – there is only one interviewer and one candidate present during the interview.
- Group – more than one candidate is being interviewed at the same time.

All candidates are together and all can hear each other's questions and answers. The interview may be conducted by a panel or an individual.

Methods of Conducting Interviews

- Face-to-Face
- Teleconference
- Video Conference
- Videotaped

Part 2: During the Interview

- Arrival: Arrive 15 minutes ahead of time.
- Introduce yourself confidently.
- Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication: Make eye contact, smile, speak clearly, and listen carefully.
- Respond to questions thoughtfully and honestly: Make answers specific and organized, frame answers positively. Take a minute to organize response/thoughts before speaking. Tell only the important information
- Time: Be aware of your time. Take time and use silence effectively. Balance your time, if possible, to allow for quality responses to all questions.
- Questions: Ask clarifying questions if you do not understand the question or are not sure of the type of response the interviewer is looking for.
- Ask your prepared questions.
- At the end: Conclude with a thank you and a handshake.

The PARTNER Technique

There are techniques that can be used to guide you through the interview. One technique is known as "PARTNER".

Poise

Appearance

Rapport

Thoroughness of response

Note your surroundings

Express yourself clearly

Reflect on the good and the not so good

What shouldn't you do?

- Do NOT bite your nails, twist your hair, move around continuously, or make unnecessary noise by tapping finger or moving chair.
- Do NOT make assumptions about what is going to be asked by the interviewer. If you are thinking too much about what they are going to ask or are asking, you may miss the question or important information and you are not actively listening.
- Do NOT lie or exaggerate responses, or respond sarcastically.
- Do NOT bad-mouth others or talk about sensitive issues.

Part 3: After the Interview

Following up after the interview

Send a "Thank You" letter.

Reflect on the interview.

Ask for feedback on the interview.

- "Thank You" Letter: Send the selecting official a thank you letter immediately following the interview, preferably the same day or the beginning of the next day. An email is acceptable, and in many cases recommended due to the limited time frame between the interview and the hiring decision. When writing email thank you letters, write it as you would a hard-copy letter. The letter should thank the official and the panel (where applicable) for their time and should also reiterate your qualifications and enhance your interview.
- Interview Reflection: Take time to reflect on the questions asked and how you responded to those questions. Think about how you presented yourself, and what you feel you did well and what you feel you could do better or differently.
- Feedback on interview (if an option): Ask the selecting official for feedback on the interview. This is not always an option, but make the effort to find out how people perceived you and their reflections on you. Even if you do not get the job, you can learn where you can improve, either in any of your qualifications or in your interview responses and delivery.