



Interview Preparation

Strategies for Success



Shawnee State University
Career Services



What to Wear to an Interview

First impressions are important. Your interview is a space where a potential employer tries to understand what kind of employee you will be. Are you thoughtful? Do you consider details? Are you taking this job opportunity seriously? When an employer lays eyes on you for the first time, they will already be trying to answer these questions. Professionally presenting yourself through your appearance is one way that you can set a great tone for your interview.

1. A two-piece suit is often recommended in a dark color (e.g., navy, black, gray) with a button-down dress shirt. This will allow you to be presented as professional and put together. If you do not have a blazer, use a cardigan as a great layering piece that models the look of a suit jacket.
2. You might consider a tie. Be sure that your tie has a simple pattern that matches the colors on your shirt.
3. Wear dress shoes with matching socks or hosiery. Be sure your shoes are clean and polished, preferably a dark color (e.g., brown or black) or coordinate with your outfit.
4. Clean your fingernails. Make sure that they are clean and trimmed to maintain a professional look.
5. Get a haircut (as needed; it depends on the job) and make sure that any facial hair is trimmed and neat. Doing so will help you maintain a clean, professional look.
6. Carry a portfolio into the interview with copies of your resume, a notepad, and a pen. This will convey that you are well-prepared and serious about the position.
7. Wear natural-looking make-up and nail polish if you use these items. It will make you look more polished to have thought through the details of manicured nails, natural lip gloss, and light blush on your cheeks.
8. Wear simple and classic jewelry. You cannot beat a pair of diamond stud earrings for a touch of class and sophistication. Often, those who identify as male will only wear wedding rings, class rings, or a nice watch to interviews and omit earrings or other types of jewelry.



What Not to Wear to an Interview

Our style is an essential form of expression in our personal lives. However, in an interview, we want our words and ideas, not our attire, to convey the individuality we will bring to the job. The following expressions of clothing typically detract from the professional presentation. Try to avoid the following:

1. A lot of perfume, cologne, or aftershave. You do not want to overwhelm the interviewer throughout the interview. A negative experience could hinder your chances of getting a job.
2. Very bold jewelry. Keep jewelry simple.
3. Backpacks or large purses. Do not bring big, bulky backpacks/bags into an interview. They do not look professional. Carry a professional portfolio.
4. Very bright or large-patterned clothing. Sticking to neutral colors, such as navy, grey, or black, is best.
5. Ill-fitting clothes. It is a good idea to have tailored clothes to fit appropriately.
6. Visible tattoos. During an interview, make sure the focus is on you rather than your tattoos by wearing a long sleeve shirt and a suit jacket
7. Inappropriate shoes. Sandals, riding boots, athletic shoes, platform heels, and strappy evening shoes are typically considered inappropriate for an interview. All shoes should be clean and look well maintained.
8. Pants, dresses, shirts, or skirts that are too tight or too short. An acceptable skirt should fall right above your knee so that when you sit down, your thighs are covered. Cleavage should be covered.
9. Cell phone. Please leave it out of the interview. You will not need it during the interview and don't want to risk it accidentally going off.
10. Sleeveless shirts. A tank top is not your best option for an interview because it is sleeveless and not tailored enough. If you wear a sleeveless top, make sure you layer it with a jacket or cardigan.

It is essential to know that these suggestions are not the same for all occupations; however, they apply to most! Please feel free to discuss these details further with Career Services.

Preparing for an Interview

Effective Interviewing- Do's

1. Thoroughly research institutions and the job; know the website.
2. Be relaxed but confident.
3. Be sincere and listen with your full attention.
4. Maintain eye contact, especially when making your key points.
5. Be able to state specific goals.
6. Dress professionally.
7. Be friendly but not too pushy.
8. Maintain attentive posture and watch your nonverbal communication.
9. Be a problem solver – suggest solutions.
10. Express 100% interest in the job you are interviewing for.
11. Know issues, trends, and your philosophy surrounding the job in question.
12. Self-assuredly express your strengths and accomplishments.
13. Pause before responding to questions.
14. Prepare interview questions in advance. Write down some points and practice aloud.
15. Speak in a confident voice and be enthusiastic.
16. Write thank you notes or emails to your interviewers after your interview.
17. Use action verbs in your interview and on your resume.
18. Attend conference programs in your desired field for information and contacts.
19. Give concrete examples to back up your points.
20. Relax, take deep breaths, and gather your thoughts before your interview.
21. Be able to translate your skills to the employer's needs.
22. Be ready to answer the following questions in 3-5 sentences each "Tell me about yourself," "What can I do for you?" "In what ways can your skills and background be of benefit?"
23. Ask thoughtful questions that pertain to responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities for involvement, staff development, job analysis, supervisor communications, and accountability.
24. Be on time or a little early (15-30 minutes prior to the interview).

Effective Interviewing DON'TS

1. Use slang, overtalk (too much or disruptive), or argue.
2. Be critical or negative.
3. Say, "Well, at X college, we do it this way."
4. Be defensive or act intimidated.
5. Chew gum or tap tables.
6. Look at the floor or tell jokes.
7. Beg or Boast.
8. Put the interviewer on the spot.
9. Volunteer personal information, especially values, associations, and bad experiences.
10. Suggest that the job is a stepping stone.
11. Express "sour grapes" or bad-mouth others.

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12. Have too many interviews in a row – allow personal time.
 13. Talk in generalities (e.g., “I am hardworking”). Give me an example of how you are hardworking.
 14. Waste words and repeat yourself.
 15. Express concern about the title, status, salary, and fringe benefits during the interview (This is okay to do after you have the job offer).
 16. Delay the interviewer.
 17. Ask philosophical or overly general questions.
 18. Act too friendly (even if rapport seems strong).
 19. Go into too much detail – try to keep responses under 3-4 minutes; however, do not race through your answers.
 20. Be over casual in dress or approach.
 21. Take your appearance for granted – check it in a mirror or ask someone.
 22. Be late, huffing, disorganized, or with excuses such as “My watch stopped,” etc.

Approaches to Interview Questions

Want to look confident during your interview? Preparing, writing down, and rehearsing “points to make” in response to questions and those you wish to initiate yourself (either through your questions or assertive statements) are essential for success. This strategy does not mean memorizing word-for-word answers or using someone else’s “pat responses” for your situation. The following questions are some samples:

“Tell me about yourself.”

“I will complete my master’s degree in College Student Development this spring with a good deal of practical experience in academic advising and assisting student study skills problems. I am particularly interested in time management for students. I am eager to find an Assistant Dean position at a small college where I can contribute to various student affairs functions.”

“How would you describe your shortcomings?”

“I have only had a little experience in career planning, but because of the importance I think it has across all student areas, I have read quite a bit of the literature and have incorporated career ideas into my advising in the Campus Activities Office.”

Some Questions to Consider and to Research before your Interview:

1. What makes you qualified for the position?
2. What are the pluses and minuses of working in a large company...small?
3. What do you know about our company? What do you like...not like?
4. Describe the important quality required for success in this position.
5. Give me the best example of your leadership ability.
6. What does success in insert career here work mean to you?
7. What do you feel are your greatest strengths? Some of your weaknesses?
8. How does this salary range fit your expectations?
9. Viewing this position, what are some ways you measure accountability?
10. What are some of the major issues you see for our field in the future?
11. What research ideas do you have for this kind of setting?
12. How important is it for you to advance in our field?
13. Why did you choose Residence Life (or another functional area) as your specialty?
14. Why did you decide to go to Shawnee State University?
15. How do you feel about your education?
16. What are some qualities or experiences that set you apart from the other applicants?
17. What is your personal philosophy of insert your field here practice?

Some Questions to Consider Asking at an Interview:

1. What are some of the strengths of the company? Possible concerns for the future?
2. Do you have information on housing, cost of living, and the community?
3. What are some career advancement opportunities for someone entering this position?
4. What kind of orientation and training is available to new employees?
5. Is there tuition reimbursement for employees interested in taking coursework? Is this encouraged?
6. What are the specific duties for this position (if not previously made clear)? Where do you see the major emphasis?
7. How large is the department? What are some other offices with which I would work?
8. Are there any long-range plans for the office?
9. Is there support for professional development? Is involvement in professional associations encouraged?

Interview Role Play: Practice Questions

The questions below were designed to help you think through some of the most common interview questions. Thinking through these questions ahead of time will help you appear decisive and confident in your interview. It can be helpful to have another person ask you these questions so that you can work on your presentation, mannerisms, and responses.

Personal:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths? Your weaknesses?
3. How do your friends describe you?
4. What do you do in your spare time?
5. If you could change one thing about your personality, what would it be? Why?
6. Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume?
7. What is your greatest accomplishment to date, and why?
8. How do you define success?
9. What is something of which you are not particularly proud?
10. What was the most difficult decision you have ever had to make?

Education:

1. Why did you decide to attend ___ College/University?
2. Why did you choose your major?
3. What was your favorite course? Least favorite?
4. What was your greatest flaw, and how does this affect you in school?
5. What do you like least about writing a term paper?
6. How do you balance your schoolwork with clubs, jobs, etc.?
7. Describe your study habits.
8. Describe a time when you received a lower grade than you felt you deserved. What do you do?
9. If you were to start over, what would you change and why?

Company and Industry Knowledge:

1. What do you know about the company?
2. Why do you want to work for this company?
3. How did you prepare for this interview?
4. Why do you want to work in this industry?
5. What can you contribute?
6. What qualifications do you possess that will make you successful in this field?
7. What do you see as the current trends in this industry? How will that impact our company?

Experience:

1. Describe a situation where your work or an idea was criticized and how you handled it.
2. Describe what excellent customer service means to you.
3. Describe a situation in which you have demonstrated initiative.
4. Describe a situation that did not go exactly as you planned and how you handled it.
5. Describe your ideal manager.
6. Describe a time when you tackled a tough or unpopular project/assignment.
7. Describe a situation when you had to work with someone you did not like.
8. Describe the situations in which you were most comfortable as a leader.
9. Describe a leader you admire.
10. Describe an environment that is ineffective for you to operate in.
11. What situations cause the greatest amount of stress?
12. Give a specific example of a problem you have recently encountered and how you resolved this.
13. Give an example of a group project you were involved in. What was your role in the group?
14. Give a specific example of when you dealt with an irate customer or peer. How did you handle this situation?
15. Can you provide an example where you had to persuade someone to do something in their best interest?
16. What do people find awkward about working on a team with you?
17. What problems do you have getting along with others?
18. Finish the sentence, "Successful managers..."
19. What are some of the things a former supervisor did that you disliked?
20. How do you handle criticism, and what are your faults?
21. How do you go about making decisions?
22. How did you get your summer job?
23. In what ways have you been a leader?

Career Goals:

1. What aspects of your job do you consider the most crucial?
2. What are your long-term personal and professional goals?
3. Where do you want to be in three years? Five years? Ten years?
4. What are your plans for continued education?
5. Describe your ideal career.
6. What is the most important reward you expect from a job?

More Questions YOU can ask the Interviewer:

1. Do not ask for anything that can be found on the internet or in company literature.
2. What are the qualities of the ideal candidate for this position?
3. What are the measures of success for this position?
4. What are your immediate goals for this position?
5. What do you consider the five most important day-to-day responsibilities of this job? Why?
6. What personality traits do you consider to be critical to success in this job?
7. What are my potential career paths within the company?
8. What is the best thing you know about the company? What is the worst thing you know about this company?
9. How is orientation/training conducted?
10. Who will this position report to?
11. What is the history of this position?
12. What do you think is your company's greatest obstacle in the next twelve months?
13. Could you tell me the characteristics of those who performed well in this position?
14. Why did the last person leave this position? (If it is an existing position)
15. What are the major challenges the department/company is facing this year?
16. Who do you see as a key competitor?
17. How long have you worked for the company?
18. What has been your career path with the company?
19. What will I be doing within the first three months? Six months?
20. How do YOU know that you hired the right candidate within the first year on the job?
21. Is there anything else you would like to know about me or my experience?
22. Can I tell you something you may not know about me that I am very proud of?

**This will allow you to differentiate yourself, increase the likelihood that you will stand out, and provide new meaningful information to the recruiter. For example, "I am proud that my team came in first in the nation marketing presentation last year." Or "I am proud that I just ran my first marathon last week."*

Mock Interview Assessment

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Location: _____

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Score + Notes
Appearance	<p>Overall, appearance is unprofessional.</p> <p>Choice in clothing inappropriate for an interview (torn, unclean, wrinkled)</p> <p>Poor grooming.</p>	<p>Appearance is somewhat untidy.</p> <p>Choice in clothing is inappropriate (shirt untucked, tee-shirt, too much jewelry, etc.)</p> <p>A grooming attempt is evident.</p>	<p>Overall neat appearance.</p> <p>Choice in clothes is acceptable for the type of interview.</p> <p>Well-groomed (ex. Shirt is tucked in, jewelry blends with clothing, minimal wrinkles.)</p>	<p>Overall appearance is very neat and impeccable.</p> <p>Choice in clothing appropriate for any job interview.</p> <p>Very well-groomed (hair, make-up, clothes pressed, etc.)</p> <p>Overall appearance is business-like.</p>	
Greeting	<p>Unacceptable behavior and language.</p> <p>Unfriendly and discourteous.</p> <p>Did not greet or shake hands.</p>	<p>Used typical behavior and language- did modify behavior to fit the Interview.</p> <p>Attempts to be courteous to all in the interview setting.</p>	<p>Acceptable behavior, well mannered, professionalism lacking.</p> <p>Courteous to all involved in the interview.</p> <p>Appropriate greeting but did not shake hands.</p>	<p>Professional behavior and language (shook hand, appropriate greeting, "hello," "thank you," eye contact, etc.)</p> <p>Friendly and courteous to all at the interview.</p>	
Communication	<p>Presentation shows a lack of interest.</p> <p>Unable to articulate goals.</p> <p>Speaking is unclear-very difficult to understand. (Mumbling, etc.)</p> <p>Facts about the job are not discussed.</p> <p>Volume is inappropriate for the interview. (Ex: spoke too loudly or softly.)</p>	<p>Showed some interest.</p> <p>Articulates goals, but they are not specific or unrealistic.</p> <p>Speaking in unclear- lapses in sentence structure and grammar.</p> <p>Knowledge of the job is minimal.</p> <p>Volume is uneven (varied.)</p>	<p>Showed interest throughout the interview.</p> <p>Clearly describes goals.</p> <p>Speaks clearly.</p> <p>Minimal mistakes in sentence structure and grammar.</p> <p>Knowledge and facts about the job are included/shared.</p> <p>Volume is appropriate.</p>	<p>Very attentive.</p> <p>Is able to tie position or company to career goals.</p> <p>Speaks clearly.</p> <p>Appropriate use of sentence structure and grammar.</p> <p>Commitment & enthusiasm for the job is conveyed.</p> <p>Volume conveys a business tone.</p>	
Body Language	<p>Fidgeted. Ex: constant movement of hands and feet.</p> <p>Lack of eye contact.</p> <p>Slouching posture.</p>	<p>Fidgeted (ex. Movement of hands and feet frequently.</p> <p>Eye contact is made intermittently.</p> <p>Occasionally slouching.</p>	<p>Minimal fidgeting (ex., Occasionally shifting.)</p> <p>Occasional loss of eye contact.</p> <p>Brief slouching but quickly correcting self.</p>	<p>No fidgeting.</p> <p>Eye contact was made.</p> <p>Sitting straight in chair.</p>	

Responding to Questions	Inappropriate responses to questions. Did not attempt to answer questions. Cannot describe strengths. Unable to explain gaps in work history.	Gives inaccurate answers. Attempts to answer questions. Mentions strengths but cannot give an example. Is negative or defensive about past work gaps.	Answers are acceptable and accurate. Answers questions. Can give several examples of strengths. Explains gaps in employment well.	Thorough answers to questions. Able to describe strengths in relation to the position description. Describes gaps in employment in a positive, responsible way.	
Asking Questions	No questions asked.	Asks questions that were not related to the job.	Asks questions pertaining to the desired position.	Questions show evidence that the applicant has researched the business or career field.	
Total Score =					

Document Review

Cover Letter- Appearance, grammar, relevance, etc.

- Excellent (4)
 Acceptable (3)
 Needs Some Improvement (2)
 Major Revision (1)
 No Cover Letter (0)

Comments:

Resume- Content, appearance, grammar, etc.

- Excellent (4)
 Acceptable (3)
 Needs Some Improvement (2)
 Major Revision (1)
 No Cover Letter (0)

Comments:

Recommendations:

- Hire
 Not hire
 Place on file

Overall Evaluation/Comments:

Total Score: _____ **Grade for Mock Interview:** _____

Grading Scale

32-29= Excellent 28-25= Very Good 24-21= Good 20-17= Fair 16-0 Poor

Interviewer Signature

Date