

The best form of preparation for an employment interview is practice. The more you practice answering questions such as the ones listed below, the more comfortable you will be in an actual interview situation. However, being well prepared does not mean memorizing responses to these questions. It's not too difficult to see why. You could easily become confused if a question were phrased slightly differently than you had expected. Also, interviewers are cautious of applicants who have answers that sound too rehearsed. Careful preparation will give you confidence and not "canned" answers. Each interviewer you meet with may have a different interviewing style. However, you are likely to encounter three basic types of interviews--structured, unstructured, and behavioral.

In a **structured interview** the recruiter asks each applicant a specific set of questions. In some cases he or she may write down your responses. A very structured interview may feel rather rigid and formal. A typical question in a structured interview might be "What are your career goals and objectives?"

Unstructured interviews are more conversational. The recruiter has some general questions in mind, but there will be more give and take of information. In an extremely unstructured interview the recruiter may ask very few questions and leave it up to you to initiate a discussion of your qualifications. An unstructured interview might open with the statement "Tell me something about yourself."

In a **behavioral interview** the recruiter will ask very pointed questions regarding how you have handled specific kinds of situations, or how you would anticipate dealing with the kinds of challenges presented on the job. A typical question in a behavioral interview might be "Tell me how you handled a recent conflict situation."

As you can see, no matter what the interviewing style, it is important to be prepared, self-confident, and flexible. On rare occasions an interviewer may ask improper questions. These include references to your race, ethnicity, age, marital status, religion, family background or disability. Questions about these areas are considered unacceptable, and some are illegal.

The list below includes examples of the kinds of questions interviewers are most likely to ask you. While interviewers have varying opinions about which questions are the most important, they offer the following advice about how to best handle an interview:

- Be prepared--do your homework on the company.
- Communicate excitement about your career field.
- Have a well-defined career objective.
- Be confident selling yourself, but not overconfident or pushy.
- Be prepared to speak knowledgeably about your academic discipline, your chosen profession and the company with which you are interviewing.
- Prepare appropriate questions in advance (not about benefits or training!).
- Take time to think before you answer questions.
- Relax and be yourself.

Sample Questions

We have organized the following questions into subject categories to help you prepare your answers. We suggest that you take time to write down brief answers to familiarize yourself with the questions and your responses.

Personal and Motivational Factors

1. Please tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself?
2. Who or what had the greatest influence on your life?
3. What are some of the greatest personal challenges you have faced during your lifetime?
4. How would you handle rejection?
5. What motivates you to put forward your greatest effort?

Skills and Abilities

1. What skills and abilities do you possess that will help make you successful in today's job market?
2. Why should our organization hire you?
3. For you, what are some of the pros and cons of working on a team project?
4. What kind of relationship should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her?
5. Who was the most difficult person you have ever dealt with, and how did you respond?
6. How did you organize your time in school/work/play?
7. What are your major strengths and weaknesses?
8. In what organizational structure do you function best?
9. Please tell me about your communication skills (or, problem solving skills, leadership style).
10. What do you see as your greatest challenge when starting a new career?
11. If you could create the perfect job for yourself, what would you be doing?

Knowledge of the Organization

1. Why did you select XYZ company? What are your expectations of the XYZ company?
2. What attracts you to this industry?
3. What do you know about our company?
4. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?

Career Goals and Objectives

1. What are your short-range and long-range goals and objectives? How are you preparing to achieve them?
2. What are your goals and aspirations for the next three years? Five years?
3. Why do you think you would be good at this profession?

Work Experiences

1. What prior work experiences have you had?
2. What were your accomplishments? What were your most significant achievements?
3. What would your last two employers say about you as an employee, either good or bad?
4. What projects were accomplished during your time on the job, and how?
5. What experiences did you have when meeting deadlines?
6. What did you enjoy most about your previous job experiences? Least?
7. Can you tell me about your toughest job assignment?
8. Please tell me about a conflict situation and how you resolved it.

Extracurricular Activities and College Experiences

1. Please tell me about your accomplishments in extracurricular activities.
2. Please describe your most rewarding college experiences.
3. If you could relive your college experiences, what would you do differently?
4. What changes would you make in your overall campus life?
5. What were your major responsibilities in campus organizations or activities?

Academic Programs and Achievements

1. Why did you choose this major field of study? Why did you choose to attend USF?
2. What were your favorite college courses? Least favorite? Why?
3. How would you relate your academic accomplishments to future career aspirations?
4. What electives did you take outside of your major? Why?
5. What are your academic strengths? What courses gave you the most difficulty?
6. Do you think your grades are a good indicator of your future career potential?

Hypothetical Questions

1. What could you see as the major objective of this job?
2. If we hired you, how would you identify the major roles and responsibilities of your new position?

Accomplishments and Achievements

1. In addition to your educational and professional experiences, what else would you like us to know about you in order to make an appropriate decision?
2. What are your greatest achievements at this point in life? Of what accomplishments are you most proud?

Geographic Preferences

1. What geographical location interests you most when working?
2. Are you willing to relocate? Do you mind traveling?

Salary and Benefits

1. What starting salary do you expect as an employee?
2. How do you feel about an income made up totally of commissions?
3. When comparing one company offer to another, what factors will be important to you besides salary?

*For more information, refer the Career Development Center's handouts on Negotiating Salary and Benefits