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Preparing a Job Interview File
Interviewing, Considering Offers, and Making Decisions

invitation to interview, make sure you understand the financial arrangements. However, if the interview is close to your home, do not push the issue of expenses; always use tact and common sense.

ORGANIZING MATERIALS

Planning your interview strategy involves preparation of supporting materials which can be used to facilitate the exchange of information. You will find it helpful to organize an interview packet containing the following relevant materials:

- several copies of your vita
- transcripts
- references and evaluations
- selected items from application portfolio
- copies of all correspondence with interviewing institution

The packaging of this material is a matter of personal preference. A simple file folder may be sufficient or you may prefer to use a notebook or an attaché case. Regardless of how you organize these materials, they must be easily accessible and relatively inconspicuous. Presenting selected items from your interview packet at appropriate times can give the impression of a highly organized professional. Inappropriate use of the same materials can be distracting and a waste of valuable interview time. Recognize that these materials are supplemental and must be used judiciously if at all. Always be prepared to present the materials to illustrate a point or in response to a question but do not plan a presentation around them. Whether or not you use the materials, organizing a packet will assist you in reviewing for the interview and will bolster confidence in your ability to handle interview situations.

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

It is obvious that gathering information and organizing relevant papers are important steps in successful interviewing. Another important step is planning your wardrobe. Most job seekers assume that they will be spending money on the job search; vita production, stationery, postage, and interview expenses are accepted as necessary budget items. When it comes to choosing interview attire, making do with what you have may be a false economy. Faculty and staff members and

employers in other professions are aware of the financial strain on graduate students and young professionals but regardless of the employer's level of empathy, the job seeker who makes the best overall impression will be the one who is ultimately selected. Consciously or unconsciously, people do make judgments based on appearance, and you need to look as good in person as you did on paper.

A suit, or at least a sports coat and tie, should be considered standard interview attire for men. For daytime interviews a sports coat with coordinating slacks is acceptable. A suit is preferred for evening receptions or functions. Dresses and suits are standard interview outfits for women, and dresses are always preferred for evening wear. Use common sense in choosing interview attire; always select clothing you feel comfortable in, always dress to your physical advantage, and always select attire that is appropriate for the position.

Don't be misled by the habitual appearance of your instructors or academic colleagues. Because of the casual, more relaxed attitude about appearance that prevails on many campuses and the typical range of academic salaries, professors are rarely placed on anyone's best-dressed list. Those who do attempt to make a statement by the way they dress are likely to strive for an aura of nonconformity, shabby elegance, or genteel poverty. Depending upon your field and the level of the position for which you are applying, a good rule of thumb might be to dress for an interview a little more formally or conservatively than you would expect to dress for a typical workday on the job. For example, a studio artist and a professor of economics will dress very differently in their everyday work situations and may dress somewhat differently for interviews. An artist in a sports coat may be as appropriately dressed as an economist in a three-piece suit.

Regardless of your field or the level of the position for which you are applying, it is possible to calculate your appearance so that you do not run the risk of harming your professional image or offending a potential employer. For any interview, these items are out:

- loud colors or unusual patterns
- plunging necklines (for either sex)
- extreme hemlines (maxi or mini)
- jeans
- leisure suits
- suntops or muscle shirts
- chiffon dresses
- extreme hairdos
- excessive jewelry

- heavy perfume
- sunglasses
- hunting boots
- scuffed shoes

Finally, if you plan ahead. The better you will fit in and receive assistance with excitement.

Appropriate attire for a first impression. The night before the interview will produce a long career sensibly, and drink on your ability to

ANTICIPATING

Many new job seekers realize that some hints to ask probing questions of the dissertation. The tough content and methods. You select a committee has been through an examination of your published work and contact with you.

It is not unusual of the questions, which are critical because they are more than do question experience. You need of wide-ranging information. Church and large research you have taken institution you

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- heavy perfume/after-shave
- sunglasses
- hunting boots, sneakers, sandals, or moccasins
- scuffed shoes

Finally, if your interview situation requires travel and a change of clothing, plan ahead. The best traveler is a light traveler. Choose clothing that will pack well and will fit into one bag. Your image will not be enhanced if you require assistance with excessive baggage.

Appropriate attire and immaculate grooming are vitally important in creating a first impression, but you also need to consider your physical well-being. The night before the interview should be devoted to rest and relaxation. The interview will produce enough stress and exhaustion without putting yourself through a long cramming session the night before. Plan to get adequate rest, eat sensibly, and drink only moderately, if at all. Your interview performance depends on your ability to be alert and articulate.

ANTICIPATING QUESTIONS

Many new job seekers expect the interview to resemble an oral examination. It is true that some hiring officials or members of an academic search committee tend to ask probing questions about recent work experiences or research, especially the dissertation. If you are invited to make a presentation, be prepared to field tough content and theoretical questions about your topic and your research methods. You should be aware, however, that long before the interview the committee has begun to form opinions about your achievements and potential through an examination of your vita, an analysis of the references in your dossier, your published work, writing samples you submitted, and even, perhaps, by direct contact with your mentor, principal teachers, or current or previous employer.

It is not unusual and you should not be surprised to find that the majority of the questions are oriented toward other aspects of your qualifications. These questions, which may seem simpler and less academic, can prove to be even more critical because they reveal more about your attitudes, character, and personality than do questions focusing only on specifics of your academic training or experience. You must be ready and willing to express your viewpoints on a number of wide-ranging topics. Questions will vary with the type of institution or organization. Church-related organizations, small private colleges, specialized schools, and large research-centered institutions have particular needs and concerns. If you have taken the time to become familiar with basic facts about the employing institution you should be able to anticipate relevant questions.

Applicants for academic and professional positions can expect to encounter many of the following questions:

- Why did you apply for this position?
- How does your training relate to this opening?
- Why did you decide to become an educator? (or researcher or librarian, etc.)
- Why did you choose to do your graduate work at X University?
- When do you expect your degree to be granted?
- How did you choose your dissertation topic?
- Think of the two or three teachers who have had the most influence on you and tell why.
- Who were your principal teachers?
- Have you had any experience with grant applications?
- Have you submitted articles for publication?
- How would you describe your style of teaching? counseling? administration?
- How do you feel this department contributes to the overall goals of this institution?
- What in your background will help you make special contributions?
- Would you be willing to perform on-site supervision of student internships?
- Would you be willing to be active in departmental or campus committees?
- How do you balance research and teaching?
- What are your current research interests?
- What do you find most satisfying about teaching?
- What courses could you teach in addition to those we have discussed?
- Are there courses you prefer to teach? not to teach?
- Would you be willing to teach a related course in another department?
- Would you be willing to team-teach a required course for lower-division students?
- Would you be interested in summer teaching?
- Would you consider teaching a survey course for non-majors?
- Would you be willing to sponsor a club for majors in this department?

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QUESTIONS YOU :

Anyone preparing for have been established Questions regarding other questions may piate or illegal unl you will encounter inappropriate quest Whatever the quest following questions

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- What courses outside your field would you encourage your students to take?
- Would it ever be possible for every student in one of your classes to earn an A?
- Would you encourage a good student to switch majors?
- How do you feel about a student wishing to obtain a double major?
- The college attempts to influence a student's character as well as academic development. Is this compatible with your philosophy of education?
- Because of this college's religious affiliation, we consider moral and spiritual values an integral part of the educational process. Would you be comfortable with this philosophy?
- Do you believe that a faculty member should only be concerned with a student's academic problems?
- Would you plan to attend extracurricular activities in which your students may be involved?

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULDN'T BE ASKED

Anyone preparing for an interview should be aware that federal and state guidelines have been established regarding the type of information which can be requested. Questions regarding race, religion, or national origin are always inappropriate; other questions may be considered potentially discriminatory and are inappropriate or illegal unless they are asked of each applicant. Because the interviewers you will encounter are seldom personnel specialists, it is quite possible that some inappropriate questions may be raised innocently with no intent to discriminate. Whatever the questioner's intention may be, you are not obligated to answer the following questions:

- Do you wish to be addressed as Miss or Mrs.?
- Do you mind answering some personal questions?
- Do you plan on living in this community?
- How long do you expect to work for us?
- What is your spouse's occupation?
- Whom should we notify in case of an emergency?
- Where do your parents live and what do they do for a living?
- When and where were you born?

- When did you become a citizen of the U.S.?
- What is your native language?
- How did you learn to read/write/speak a foreign language?
- What is your religious affiliation?
- Of what societies/clubs/lodges are you a member?
- What is your military experience?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- Would you please submit a photograph with your application materials?
- What is your marital status?
- What type of military discharge did you receive?
- What was your maiden name?
- Are you now pregnant?
- Do you have children?
- Who cares for your children while you are at work?
- Are you the principal wage earner of your household?
- Do you have a disability?
- Have you ever had a drug-related problem?
- Do you use drugs or alcohol?
- Have you ever been treated for a mental or emotional problem?

If you are asked any questions of this type, you should realize that you have more than one option. If you feel that your answer will not be to your disadvantage, you can simply provide the information requested. You can also answer the question but let the interviewer know that this type of question is inappropriate. For example, in response to a question about your marital status, you could respond, "Yes, I've been married for several years, but I don't consider that fact pertinent to my career plans." You might also respond with a question, such as, "Do you see my marital status as significant to my qualifications for this position?" For some questions, especially those that relate to emergency contacts or number of dependents (which can be required for insurance coverages or other employee benefits), you may indicate that the information will be provided upon employment. Another response to an inappropriate question might be to sidestep the question but offer information that will concentrate on your skills and abilities. If you are asked about child-care arrangements, for example, you might answer, "I am as well organized in my personal life as I am in my professional responsibilities, and I am confident that this will not pose a problem." You should clearly

understand that you are not asking questions and, if you choose, answer politely but firmly. Whether the question is even amusing, if you have a response, it is appropriate or discriminatory question, guilt, or discomfiting

HOW YOU SAY IT IS IMPORTANT

Your response to any question should be in a manner in which you reply. The manner in which you reply of speaking play a significant role. Body language are also important. Fidgeting, slouching, or other expressions detract from the information you create. By listening carefully, you can control what you say.

ALWAYS

- evaluate the question
- be ready to give an answer
- be thorough but concise
- enunciate clearly
- be positive

NEVER

- mislead, lie, or omit
- give vague, general answers
- rush your answer
- be intimidated
- criticize or speak negatively
- make excuses

WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN

Depending upon the opportunity to ask questions, you should ask questions though interviewers are not all will set aside

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understand that you are not obligated to answer inappropriate or discriminatory questions and, if you choose not to provide the information, you should decline politely but firmly. Whether you see these questions as unnerving, frustrating, or even amusing, if you have prepared for the possibility of encountering inappropriate or discriminatory questions you will be able to respond without intimidation, guilt, or discomfiting embarrassment.

HOW YOU SAY IT IS IMPORTANT, TOO

Your response to any question will be judged not only on the content but on the manner in which you reply. The tone and quality of your voice and your manner of speaking play a significant role in the image you project. Nonverbal cues or body language are also important elements. Excessive gesturing, exaggerated facial expressions, fidgeting, slouching, or any nervous mannerisms are distracting and detract from the information you are offering and the impression you want to create. By listening carefully and thinking before you respond you should be able to control what you say and how you say it.

ALWAYS

- evaluate the question
- be ready to give examples
- be thorough but concise
- enunciate clearly and be audible
- be positive

NEVER

- mislead, lie, or deceive
- give vague, general, ambiguous responses
- rush your answers
- be intimidated
- criticize or speak negatively of previous experiences
- make excuses

WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN

Depending upon the interview structure and format, you may not have the opportunity to ask questions of your own until the interview is nearly finished. Although interviewers expect that you will have some questions to ask of them, not all will set aside time for this purpose. Even those who do invite questions

- What is the salary range?
- What is the total compensation?
- When do you expect to start?
- How will I be notified?

- END ON A POSITIVE NO

EVALUATING YOUR I

This is not the time for speculations can lead to your preparation and yourself with other can that influence the ultimate

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- What is the salary range for this position?
- What is the total compensation package (retirement plan, insurance, etc.)?
- When do you expect to make a decision?
- How will I be notified?

END ON A POSITIVE NOTE

Typically, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to bring the conversation to a close. If you are engaged in a series of interviews, however, you do have some responsibility to try to stay on schedule. While you cannot dictate the length of a conversation, you may exert some control by tactfully indicating that you have another person waiting to see you. In such cases, however, the interviewer generally will be aware of your schedule and will try to conclude the session within the allotted time. You need to be perceptive to cues that the conversation is drawing to a conclusion, but before leaving an interview you should know when a decision will be made and how you will be contacted. You also need to know if there is anything else required of you. If these issues are not clearly explained, be sure to ask the appropriate questions. Do not prolong the interview, but try to make your final statement as impressive as your first. A positive expression of your interest in the position and a comment that your interest has deepened on the basis of the interview is always in order—if it is true. Regardless of your feelings about the position, you should, as a professional courtesy, express appreciation for the interview.

EVALUATING YOUR INTERVIEW PERFORMANCE

In spite of the release of tension and natural post-interview relief, resist the temptation to consider the interview complete. No interview is complete without your evaluation. Whether you are waiting in a campus lounge, motel room, or airport terminal, the period immediately following the interview should be used productively. While everything is fresh in your mind, try to make some notes about important topics covered and be sure to jot down items that should have been discussed or questions you should have asked but didn't because there was insufficient time or because you simply forgot.

This is not the time to speculate on your chances of being hired. Incorrect speculations can lead to greater disappointments and letdowns and may affect your preparation and performance at future interviews. You cannot compare yourself with other candidates interviewed; nor can you know all the factors that influence the ultimate selection of the person to be hired. Consequently, it

is pointless to attempt predictions. The only speculation you should make is whether you would accept the position if offered.

The post-interview evaluation period should be a time for positive retrospection. Being overly critical of yourself or of the interviewer serves no useful purpose and results in a loss of objectivity. One of the easiest things for you to evaluate is your response to specific questions. If you stumbled or could not come up with a satisfactory answer, focus your attention on these problem areas before your next interview. Also think about those questions you answered well. Note your responses and hope that you will be asked similar questions in future interviews.

Reflecting on how you conducted yourself during social functions should also be a priority in a post-interview evaluation. Group functions in interview situations may never be easy, but you should be more relaxed the second time around. Many of your reactions will depend upon your hosts. If they take the initiative to introduce you to others and to make sure that you feel comfortable, social functions are more manageable than if you are left to circulate on your own. You should not depend on your host to act as a liaison, however. Be prepared to strike out on your own, to introduce yourself, and to chat with as many guests as possible.

FOLLOWING THROUGH

After the interview, a letter expressing your continued interest or withdrawing your name from the list of finalists must be sent to the appropriate individual (head of the search committee, department chair, director, president, etc.). Your letter can be relatively brief and to the point. If you were asked to provide additional materials or documents, they may be enclosed with your letter or you may state they are being forwarded by the appropriate office or agency. Your letter can reinforce topics discussed or introduce relevant material that was not adequately covered during the interview. Finally, but not necessarily least important, the letter demonstrates that you understand and practice professional courtesies. For an example of an interview follow-up letter, see page 56.

After you have written your follow-up letter and submitted any necessary papers or documents, you must be prepared for a waiting period while the search committee or hiring official arrives at a decision about your candidacy. Keep in mind that timelines established during your interview are not always exact. If you were informed that you would be contacted within two weeks you should not be surprised if at least three weeks go by without a letter or telephone call. Do not, however, let this waiting period drag on indefinitely; a telephone call to the hiring official inquiring about the status of your candidacy is appropriate. Unexpected developments may have delayed the decision and your inquiry will at least let you know when a decision is anticipated.

You must, of course, and that you were not the comments must be professional is a natural reaction and You may, however, express being considered for any s

CONSIDERING OFFER

The final component of Simple as this seems, even tended in different ways offer should be accepted. it can also spur a brief but For most academics and employment has far-reaching a legal and ethical consideration of the immediate future objectives.

When you are selected person, by telephone, or tion offering employment, or you may be asked Employment offers allow for your acceptance. All days or perhaps even a n a verbal commitment is with a letter outlining the and starting date. (See you be asked to sign a photocopy for your re

Once you receive and professional items t ing questions may influ

- Is this the kind
- How closely do interests and b
- Can I work co administration