AN INTERVIEW IS:

- An opportunity to sell yourself as the best candidate for a job by highlighting your strengths, skills, and qualifications.
- A two-way process in which the employer evaluates you as a potential employee, and you decide whether the position or organization is a suitable match for you.
- A presentation of the “real” you where you can demonstrate how your personality will fit with the working environment and with future colleagues.

RESOURCES AT CALS CAREER SERVICES

- Schedule a mock interview with one of the staff in CALS Career Services.
- Check BuckyNet frequently to see which employers are conducting on-campus interviews and posting positions.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Take a personal inventory by answering the following questions:

- What will convince this employer that I am the right person for the position?
- What are the strengths, achievements, skills, and areas of knowledge that make me most qualified?
- What in my background makes me stand out from the other candidates?
- If asked, what weaknesses should I admit and how will I indicate that I have improved or will improve them?

Be able to answer the simple question “So tell me a little bit about yourself?”

Construct a thoughtful, logically sequenced summary of your experience, skills, talents, and education

- Keep it tightly focused – about 250-350 words taking no more than two minutes
- Things to include:
  - Brief introduction
  - Key accomplishments and strengths demonstrated by these accomplishments
  - Importance of these strengths and accomplishments to the prospective employer
  - Where and how you see yourself developing in the positions for which you’re applying
- Write your introduction on a piece of paper
- Rehearse until it no longer sounds scripted, but natural and conversational

Anticipate other questions the interviewer might ask, prepare answers for those questions

**Five basic questions**

Beneath the lists and lists of questions typically asked by employers, there are about five basic questions they want to have answered. These questions may not be explicitly asked, but the questions are floating around beneath the surface of the conversation.

1) Why should we hire you? Why are you interested in this industry, organization, and position over others?
2) What can you do for us? If I were to hire you, would you be part of the problem I already have, or would you be a part of the solution to those problems? What are your skills, and how much do you know about some subject or field that is of interest to us?

3) What kind of person are you? By this they mean, do you have the kind of personality that makes it easy for people to work with you, and do you share the values which we have at this place?

4) What distinguishes you from others who can do the same tasks that you can? Do you have better work habits than the others, do you show up earlier, stay later, work more thoroughly, work faster, maintain higher standards, go the extra mile, or ...what?

5) Can I afford you?

Examples of how these basic questions were asked to recent graduates:

- What are your key strengths?
- What are your goals?
- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- Why did you choose your major?
- How would your best friend describe you?

Prepare several questions for the interviewer which is an effective technique to gauge YOUR interest in the organization and position.

Do your homework and research the following before your interview:

- The organization (check their web site)
- The position which you are interviewing for
- The person interviewing you

Example: What are some of this company’s goals for the next 5 years? After a year, if someone is excelling in this position, what would that look like?

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

The day(s) before and of the interview

- Prepare your materials including copies of your resume and cover letter along with a pen and notebook.
- Think about what you will wear to the interview. Does anything need to be cleaned or pressed?
- Become familiar in advance with the route you will travel to the interview (don’t forget about traffic!).
- Arrive at least 5 to 10 minutes before your scheduled interview.
- Check in with the receptionist – be friendly with office staff – the employer may ask them about you.
- Be mindful of the materials you read while waiting – best to read company material or something professional in nature.
- Take the time to compose yourself and check your appearance in a nearby restroom.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Your first impression can set the stage for what will follow. If you gain the interviewer’s interest and are perceived positively by interviewer from the beginning, you are more likely to be perceived highly in other ways (otherwise known as the halo effect). Often times, employers make a subconscious hiring decision within seconds of meeting a candidate and spend the rest of the interview trying to validate their initial impression. Therefore, it is in your best interest to convey images of professionalism, intelligence, confidence, and competence while being honest, enthusiastic, friendly, and likeable.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

- Clean and well-groomed
- Deodorant
- No chewing gum or smoking before the interview
- Limited and simple jewelry
- Light perfume, cologne, or aftershave
- Fresh breath

WHAT TO WEAR

WOMEN
Suit (skirt or pants) or tailored dress

MEN
Two-piece, well-fitted suits (black, navy or gray)
**DURING THE INTERVIEW**

EVERYTHING about you is being observed; not only your dress and interview answers, but also your body language, facial expressions, and posture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal Behavior</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>Sit with a slight forward lean, arms uncrossed</td>
<td>Communicates interest in what interviewer is saying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Contact</td>
<td>Maintain frequent eye contact</td>
<td>Establishes rapport, portrays trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling</td>
<td>Moderate amount</td>
<td>Convey positive attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>Sound positive by watching vocal inflections</td>
<td>Demonstrates interest and enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**50-50 RULE**

Studies have revealed that generally those candidates who mix speaking and listening 50-50 during the interview get hired. In other words, speak about half of the time and let the employer do the talking during the other half of the interview. Why? If you talk too much about yourself, you may portray yourself as insensitive to the needs of others and/or the organization. If you talk too little, you may seem as though you are hiding something.

**Dos and Don’ts**

Do give a firm handshake.
Do wait to be offered a seat before sitting down.
Do directly answer the question by giving a clear and concise response.
Don’t respond to a question with a simple “yes” or “no”.
Don’t say anything negative about previous employers, former colleagues or supervisors.
Don’t volunteer anything negative!
   If you volunteer something more than you wanted, you might inadvertently give the employer a reason to reject you. Let them ask first and if they do ask, then just be honest.

**INTERVIEW TYPES AND STYLES**

**SCREENING INTERVIEWS**

- Usually in large organizations, typically conducted by a human resource specialist
- Purpose is to screen out all except the most qualified candidates
- Frequently handled by telephone
- Determine if you have the minimum qualifications for the position, not if you are the best candidate
- Not usually concerned with evaluating personality or thought processes

**SELECTION INTERVIEWS**

- Conducted by a supervisor, department head, person with authority to hire you
- Employer assumes you are qualified, but now looking to see if you are a fit with the position and organization by asking many of the questions listed above

**BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS**

Relies on storytelling where the candidate relies on personal examples to support his or her claims. Employers who use this style of interview believe past behaviors predict future behaviors. This interview is used to
determine if the candidate holds the qualities most important to the position. Note the interviewer is more interested in the process (reasoning behind your actions) rather than the details of the outcome. Questions typically sound like:
- Tell me about a time when...
- Give me an example of your skills in...
- Describe a time when you...
- Why did you...

Use an easy technique for providing strong, thorough answers – **STAR**.
- **S**ituation – give an example of a situation or problem in which you had a positive outcome
- **T**ask – describe the tasks involved in the situation
- **A**ction – talk about the actions you took and obstacles you had to overcome
- **R**esults – highlight the outcome, goals you achieved, and lessons learned

You can draw from virtually any part of your past behavior – education, school projects, paid work experience, volunteer work, activities, hobbies, or family life.

**CASE INTERVIEWS**
Primarily used by consulting firms to assess your creativity, analytical ability, and interpersonal skills. Consists of an interviewer presenting you with information or a problem and it is your job to firmly understand and decompose the case, create an approach, analyze the problem, and develop a final conclusion. Practice is important. Become familiar with business periodicals such as the *Wall Street Journal* and review resources on the internet specific to particular consulting groups on how to approach case interviews.

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW**
Ask the interviewer when he or she expects to make the hiring decision or schedule the next round of interviews.
Take notes right after the interview to remember crucial details either for your thank you note or to compare with other positions for which you are applying?
Write a thank you letter (refer to *Writing Thank You Letters* handout)

Turn every interview into a learning experience. Ask yourself the following questions:
- What did you do or say that the interviewer obviously liked?
- Did you hijack the interview (grab control or speak too much – more than half the time)?
- Would you have done something differently if you could replay the interview?

Follow the interview with a telephone call if you have not heard from the employer within the time mentioned in the interview.