

Preparing for the Interview

Congratulations! You are ready to start applying for jobs, but now that your application documents are in order, it is time to submit applications and prepare for interviewing. When thinking about preparation for an interview it is important to follow the “Rule of 4 R’s” as you apply for positions:

Research Yourself:

- √ Know what your values are, and what you need from a job in order to be successful. Consider meeting with a career services staff member in order to complete the values card sort.
- √ Know what possible career paths are. Investigate online resources, have conversations with those in your network, and be an expert about your chosen path.
- √ Know what your best attributes are. This can help you to create a “personal brand” or something that sets you apart from other applicants.

Research the Company:

- √ Glassdoor.com is a great way to check out what current employees are saying about that employer.
- √ Match up what you need to be successful in a job, with the values of that employer. Know what their mission is, and consider how your job will play into that mission.
- √ Think about questions that you can ask in the interview that might help you understand this company better. You can ask these at the conclusion of your interview.

Research the Job:

- √ Know what the expectations are for this job, both those that are employer specific and those that are industry wide.
- √ Know how your previous experience prepares you for those job tasks and be able to use specific stories to demonstrate that.
- √ Know what the salary range is for that position, and be prepared to offer a number if they ask you what salary you expect (see PDF on Salary Offers and Negotiation).

Refine Interview Skills:

- √ Practice interview questions that you are likely to encounter. Use the sample interview questions in this document, or check out www.readyprepinterview.com for others. Make a mock interview appointment to get specific critique on your interview skills.
- √ Practice your handshake and brush up on non-verbal communicators.

Finishing Touches:

- √ Know what is appropriate to wear for a professional interview. Suits are highly recommended for both men and women.
- √ Prepare copies of your resume, and bring them with you in a folder or padfolio.
- √ Be sure you know how to get to the interview location, and be on time!

Practice Interview Questions

Generic Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.

In answering this question, keep in mind that the employer needs to know whether or not you are qualified for the position. You should talk about your most relevant qualifications (such as education), and why you are the best fit which might include information about how you fit in with that specific organization.

You will want to avoid all personal information that is irrelevant to your professional characteristics (i.e. age, where you are from, marital status, hobbies, information about your family of origin, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected class information).

2. What are your strengths?

You should have prepared 2-3 strengths that exemplify why you are qualified for this position. Consider using the following formula when answering the questions:

Adjective + definition + example of a time when you have demonstrated that strength.

3. What is a weakness?

The purpose of this question is to gauge your problem solving skills, so focus on a genuine weakness that you are working on solving. Be specific, and talk about the things that you have tried to work on this area of growth and how they have worked for you.

In this answer, sometimes it is less about having a great answer, and more about not having a poor answer. It is inappropriate to answer this question by saying that you do not have weaknesses, cannot think of anything, or by using an example that would disqualify you for that position (i.e. bad a patient care).

One of the most common mistakes students make is trying to “turn this into a positive” by using weaknesses such as “too much of a perfectionist, working too hard and forgetting to take breaks, taking on too much responsibility, etc.” Instead, remember to focus your energy on how you are working on your weakness—this will make it a positive answer!

4. Tell me about a time when.....

These questions, referred to as behavioral interview questions, will reference a specific skill set that the employer needs to know that you have. The best way to answer these questions is to provide specific examples and stories of times when you have used that skill. You can use a method called the STAR method to help you organize these.

Situation: One sentence, brief overview of where you were at when this occurred.

Task: What were you assigned to be doing, or what task you took on.

Action: This is where the bulk of your time answering the question will be. What were YOUR actions that helped you to address the task?

Result: One sentence, brief overview of the measurable results, or what you learned/accomplished.

5. Why should we hire you?

This should be a summary of all the things that you have already talked about, not new information. If you are using branding techniques (for more information, come see us in Career Services!) then this is the perfect time to use these.

6. What questions do you have for me?

As mentioned in the 4 R's, you should have questions prepared that help you make an informed decision about whether the job is a good fit for you or not. You do not have to accept every job you are offered, and should know how to ask questions to determine if this is the right one.

Questions you do not want to ask during this time are anything related to pay, benefits, time off, etc. Nor do you want to use this time to ask how you did in the interview. time off, etc. Nor do you want to use this time to ask how you did in the interview.

Sample Interview Scripts

Interviewer: Tell me about yourself.

Susie Good: I am a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the University of Kansas Medical Center, and just received my license to practice in Missouri. While I was doing my clinical rotations, I was able to complete a rotation in an emergency room and loved how I got to interact with new people each day, and how fast paced it was. During that rotation, I discovered that emergency nursing was what I wanted to do, and I was happy to see that opening here.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of your strengths.

Susie Good: I would say that my top strengths are that I am calm under pressure and that I am adaptable. When I say that I'm calm under pressure, I mean that I can be counted on to be level-headed and make consistently good decisions regardless of the situation. For example, when I was a freshman in college I was visiting my family for a break when the house across the street from ours caught on fire. The fire badly damaged their home, but everyone in the family was fine. In the aftermath, the firefighters were trying to salvage some of the family's belongings, specifically pictures. I immediately saw a need to help. I brought the neighbors, their friends and volunteers into our house to lay out the pictures. I sent a neighbor to Sam's club to purchase paper towels, and I contacted a local pizza shop which agreed to donate 100 pizzas to firefighters and clean up volunteers. In the end, there were around 30 people all helping out with pictures in the house and I knew I had made a difference by acting decisively in crisis to help out others. Likewise, adaptability is a strength of mine. While on clinical rotations, a supervising nurse told me that she appreciated my ability to change direction on what I was doing whenever I was asked.

Interviewer: What would you say is a weakness?

Susie Good: I would say that an area of weakness for me is prioritizing my work. I have a tendency to sometimes jump from one task to the next without finishing either. I have tried different things from writing on sticky notes, to creating email reminders. I have found that the most effective thing for me is to have a weekly one on one meeting with my supervisor. That helps me to make my pitch for what is a priority that week, and helps me to break things into more manageable chunks.

Find more sample answers here: <http://www.interviewing.com/category/job-seeker/questions/>

Career Services' Pick: Other Questions

Get the most out of your preparation by tackling some of these other questions that may be similar to ones you will hear in a real interview. For feedback on these and other questions, come in for a mock interview appointment!

Nursing Students

- √ Share an example of how you maintain accurate and detailed documentation.
- √ Share an experience you had dealing with a difficult person and how you handled the situation.
- √ Provide an example of a time when you were able to demonstrate excellent listening skills. What was the situation and outcome?
- √ Tell me how you organize, plan, and prioritize your work.
- √ What have you found to be the best way to monitor the performance of your work and/or the work of others?
- √ Can you recall an experience when a patient's care or health was substantially different because of your close monitoring?
- √ Provide an example of a time when you successfully organized a diverse group of people to accomplish a task.

Academic Track

- √ Share an experience in which you successfully prepared and/or delivered a lecture to students. How about a lecture which was not as effective?
- √ Share an experience when you applied new technology or information to your job. How did it help?
- √ How would you rate your writing skills?
- √ Provide an example when your ethics were tested.
- √ How do you keep student records? What is one thing you would like to improve on?
- √ Tell me about a time when you developed your own way of doing things or were self-motivated to finish an important task.

Doctors and Health Professionals

- √ Share a method which you have used that has helped you to maintain communication between different interested parties perhaps including insurance companies, hospital or clinic administrators, patients, and their families.
- √ Share an experience in which your ability to consider the costs or benefits of potential action helped you choose the most appropriate action.
- √ Provide an example when you were able to prevent a problem because you foresaw the reaction of another person.
- √ In your experience, what is the key to developing a good team?
- √ Tell me about a time when you dealt calmly and effectively with a high stress situation.