
INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is one of the most important components in the search for a job. It is your chance to show the employer in-person that you have the skills, personality, and ability to do the job. Interviewing is also an opportunity for the interviewer to assess your communication skills and your potential fit within the practice or business.

Preparing for the Interview

Prior to an interview, you should conduct a self-assessment to identify what skills and experiences you should convey to the interviewer. By taking some time to consider your skills, characteristics, and experiences, you will have a sense of what you can use to answer questions. Remember, you should be prepared to discuss in detail anything listed on your resume. Ask yourself:

- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What are my greatest accomplishments?
- What specific examples of experience or education can I tell the interviewer to give them a sense of my skills?
- What items do I want to make sure I tell the interviewer?

In addition to your own self-assessment, you should also continue to research the employer. This additional research will assist you in thinking of potential questions for the interviewer. Often, you will discover that you need further explanation or information about the position.

What should you plan to wear? Is it a working interview or will it take place in an office? This is an important question to ask the interviewer ahead of time so that you can plan your attire accordingly. If it is a working interview or contains some kind of skill element, most likely your scrubs will be appropriate apparel. If it does not include a technical component, then wearing a suit is highly suggested. It is always better to error on the side of being overly professional, rather than not being professional enough.

Also, consider the logistics. Where will the interview take place? Do you know where you're going? How about parking? Ahead of the interview, drive by the employer's office to determine where to park. Plan ahead so that you give yourself ample time to park and to walk to the office. Be sure to take into account the time of day and any potential yet common traffic issues. For in-person interviews, you should plan to arrive about fifteen minutes early.

Be sure to bring the following items to your interview:

- A padfolio or folder
- Extra copies of your resume, transcripts, writing samples, and references
- Questions to ask
- Pen and paper

One of the best ways to prepare for a real interview is to do a mock interview with the Office of Professional Success, faculty members, or alumni. This activity will allow you to practice answering questions as well as getting feedback on your performance. You can also practice in front of the mirror at home if you cannot schedule a mock interview.

Interview Questions

The point of an interview is to see if you are the right candidate for the job. You landed the interview because you met the employer's needs on paper; however, an interview is your chance to provide more information to the interviewer about your ability to do the job. Interview questions give the interviewer an opportunity to see how you think on your feet, how you handle stress, and whether you have the experience and skill to perform the job. Interview questions can be structured or informal. An interview will often have several questions that are asked of every interviewee but naturally other questions will arise based on your response to questions or because of something in your resume. In general, interviewers ask open-ended questions such as:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this opportunity?
- What skills from your previous position can be transferred to this position?

Interviewers also ask stress questions. Stress questions are in many cases legitimate questions but have a negative tone. In answering these questions, try to always end on a positive/constructive note by describing how you are working to improve (Ex: "I find giving constructive feedback to be my weakness, but I have been working with my supervisor to practice this skill and look forward to developing this competency further in this position"). Questions may include:

- What are your weaknesses?
- If you could change one thing about yourself professionally, what would you change?

You may also be asked behavior-based questions. Behavior-based questions elicit how you would perform certain tasks or projects by asking you to reference previous experiences and training to demonstrate a particular skill or characteristic. Behavior-based questions demand thoughtful responses. For example,

- Describe your most rewarding experience.
- Give me an example of how you have worked with someone who disagrees with you. How did you handle the situation?

It is helpful to use the STAR method to guide your response:

S: Describe the specific situation (set the scene)

T: Task (what was the goal/objective)

A: What action did you take to meet these goals or resolve this challenge?

R: What was the result?

For more information on behavior-based interview questions, see *Behavioral Interviewing Strategies for Job-Seekers* [link to http://www.quintcareers.com/behavioral_interviewing.html] by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.

Handling Difficult Questions

As you might anticipate, you may run into a difficult question. Your response to which will be judged to see how well you handle the situation. Difficult questions are very much subjective but in general you should always answer with honesty and confidence. For example, when asked, "Why do you have a low GPA?" you might reply, "Honestly, I had a difficult first semester but I have assessed my class preparation and study habits to determine short comings. You will notice that my grades the following semester have improved." Such a response indicates to the interviewer that you are poised, confident, and professional.

Another question that you may be asked is "what are your salary requirements?" This is not an illegal or improper question, however it is in your best interest to hold off on sharing a number until you have an offer in hand and can use data to determine an appropriate salary. This is because you could accidentally "low-ball" yourself; you could end up sharing a range that is below what they were willing to pay you, but now because you showed your hand, they know that they can give you the lower offer. So, if they ask you, "what are your salary requirements," you might say something like, "that's a good question. I'd like to hear more about the job duties before I provide a number."

From time to time, an interviewer may ask an inappropriate or discriminatory question. Federal and state law prohibit interviewers asking questions about

- Race (Are you African-American or Asian?)
- National Origin (Where are your parents from?)
- Religious Beliefs (Do you believe in a Christian God?)
- Age (How old are you?)
- Disability (I noticed that you have a limp. Did you recently hurt yourself?)
- Pregnancy (Are you planning to have children?)

However, interviewer might ask question that while not illegal are inappropriate. For example,

- Are you a Democrat or a Republican?
- You are young and single, do lots of women chase after you?

- What is your sexual orientation?

With illegal and inappropriate questions, you are not obligated to respond with an answer. For example, if asked, “Are you planning to have children?” your response might be, “I am committed to my work. Having a family will not affect my performance.”

If you experience an illegal or inappropriate question, please contact the Office of Professional Success.

Asking Questions

It is equally important for you to prepare questions to ask the interviewers. The interviewer will likely ask you if you have any questions, so it is important that you use this opportunity to further show why you are the person for the job. Your questions should reflect your interest in and knowledge about the employer but also content from the interview.

You should prepare your questions ahead of time, but it is also beneficial to work in questions about matters discussed during the interview; this shows that you were listening and able to think on your feet. Sample questions might include:

- How are interns supervised?
- Is there a formal review process?
- What does it take to be successful at your clinic?
- Why did you decide to join the organization/ practice/ company?
- What do you find most rewarding about practicing veterinary medicine?
- What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you least enjoy about your job?
- What words of advice can you give to a student beginning their first veterinary assistant experience?

Dos and Don'ts

What should you do during the interview?	What shouldn't you do during the interview?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a rapport with the interviewer and show your enthusiasm and interest in the position during the first three to five minutes of the interview. • Be conversational in nature and not purely question and answer session. • Laugh when appropriate and smile. • Maintain eye contact. • Be yourself yet maintain a professional demeanor. • Pause and gather your thoughts before answering. This way you assure that your response is sincere and honest, and answers the question being posed to you. • Be very pleasant to the receptionist who greets you. • Shake hands firmly and make eye contact with the person with whom you are shaking hands. • Smile sincerely! • Always address everyone you meet by Dr., Mr. or Ms., unless you are given permission to use their first name. • Ask for business cards. • Keep your answers brief (between 30 to 90 seconds). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupt the interviewer. • Speak too loudly, softly or quickly. • Use clichés, slang or improper English such as "uums" and "Ya know what I mean" statements. • Fidget. • Take control of the interview. • Overuse hand and nervous gestures. • Go off on tangents. • Chew gum. • Come unprepared. • Act cocky. • Ask about salary. • BE LATE! • Bad mouth past employers or experiences.

Phone Interviews

In some cases, you may not be able to meet the interviewer in-person and therefore a phone interview will be scheduled. Phone interviews can be tricky due to the fact that you cannot read body language. Some tips to interview most successfully and comfortably include:

- Choosing a quiet place free of distractions (i.e., other phones, computers, and people).
- Sitting at a table or desk that is free of all items except your resume and any other documents you previously submitted to the employer as well as a pad of paper and a pen.
- As you begin to answer questions, keep in mind that you are on the phone; therefore, speak clearly and a little slower than you would in-person.
- Listen carefully and answer questions directly.
- Avoid rambling.
- Let the person/persons on the other line know if you plan to type or write notes as they answer your questions so that they understand your pauses.

Following the interview

Remember to send thank you letters, notes, or emails immediately following the interview. In your thank you letter, try to reference something that you talked about in your interview to spark the interviewer's memory of you. All interviewers should receive an individual thank you.