Interviewing Skills

Participant Guide

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Welcome

Good afternoon….welcome to the ***Interviewing Skills.*** We hope you gain valuable information today regarding the job interview process. This 4-hour session will provide an overview of steps taken in preparing for the job interview process.

Audience

The Federal Resume Writing Workshop is designed for all NPS employees who wish to properly complete a federal resume

Instructor

The course instructor is Elaine Poole, Training Officer for the Capitol Training Center in Washington D.C.

Timing

The Interviewing Skills Workshop takes four hours to complete. The program will be broadcast on April 21, 2006 from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm ET.

How to Interact with the Instructor

If you were physically in the classroom with the instructor, you would raise your hand to let her/him know you had a question or comment. Then you would wait for the instructor to recognize you and ask for your question. We are all familiar with that "protocol" for asking questions or making comments.

With TELNPS courses there is also a "protocol" to follow to ensure that you can easily ask questions and others can participate as well. It may seem a little strange at first asking a question of a TV monitor. Remember, it is the instructor you are interacting with and not the monitor. As you ask more questions and participate in more TELNPS courses, you will soon be focusing only on the content of your question and not the equipment you are using to ask it.

As part of the TEL station equipment at your location, there are several push-to talk microphones. Depending on the number of students at your location, you may have one directly in front of you or you may be sharing one with other students at your table.

When you have a question, press and hold down the push-to-talk button, maintaining a distance of 12-18 inches, wait a second and then ask you question or make your comment. It would sound something like this:

Excuse me [instructor's first name], this is [your first name] at [your location]. I have a question (or I have a comment)."

Then release the push-to-talk button. This is important because until you release the button, you will not be able to hear the instructor.

The instructor will acknowledge you and then ask for your question or comment. Stating your name and location not only helps the instructor, but also helps other students who are participating at different locations to get to know their classmates.

Learning Objectives

The course objectives are:

- Explain the steps involved in the interview process
- Identify the different types of interview
- Recognize the proper attire for the interview
- Understand what the employer is looking for in a candidate
- Identify inappropriate questions

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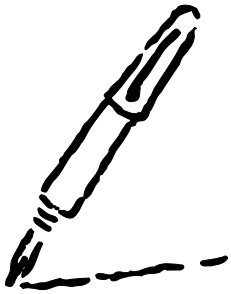

Agenda

- Introduction
- Course Objectives
- Kind of Interviews
- a. Informational
- b. Employment
- Preparation for the Interview
- a. Before
- b. During
- c. After
- Interviewer's Hidden Agenda
- Interview Questions from the Employer
- Questions you may ask during the interview
- How to handle Illegal Questions
- Questions that should not be asked
- Interview Tips
- Interview Thank You Letter
- References and Informational Materials

Different types of Interviews

Since the interview is the last phase in the selection process, employers use interviewing styles that assist in revealing those attributes of the candidate that are most essential for the job and most beneficial to the organization. Interviews can be conducted one on one, in a panel, or as a group. Interviews can be informal or formal, relaxed or stressful, directed or undirected.

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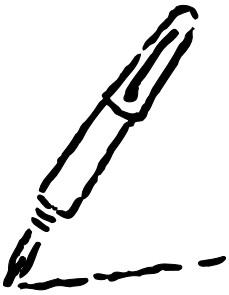

Informational Interviews

An informational interview should be an integral part of your networking and job-hunting plan. An informational interview involves talking with people who are currently working in the field to gain a better understanding of an occupation or industry and to build a network of contacts in that field.

- **Are initiated by the job seeker**
- **Valuable networking tool**
- **Goal is to obtain information about a career field**
- **Will assist you in making an objective career decision**

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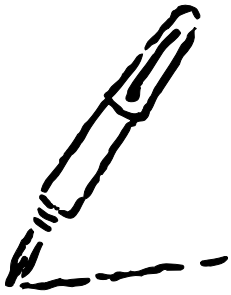

Employment Interviewing

- **Initiated by employers to assess your ability**
- **Weigh your strengths and weakness vs. other applicants**
- **Person with acceptable qualifications and ability to impress – gets the job**

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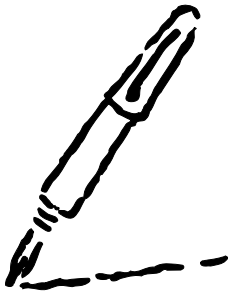

Screening Interview

- **Preliminary interview**
- **In person or by phone**
- **Employer determines if you have *BASIC* qualifications to warrant a subsequent interview**

The objective of a screening interview is to disqualify candidates who do not meet the minimal skills and experience required for the position. Those candidates who satisfy the requirements are then asked to attend a further interview with supervisors and executives in the company, who will be working with the successful candidate.

This type of interview is conducted by a Human Resources Coordinator - often someone specializing in questioning techniques that find out only the basic facts about the applicant.

The interviewer will try to verify facts contained in the resume, obtain more information, or identify any exaggerated or untrue statements. The interviewer will not concern themselves with personality traits, goals, attitude, etc., simply because they don't have the power to hire and they will not be working with the candidate.

It is important to politely and directly offer the information the interviewer seeks, and refrain from volunteering additional information. Save this for the probing questions which will occur in first and second interviews. The screening interview is basically used to "weed out" unsuitable candidates, so they never reach the next step.

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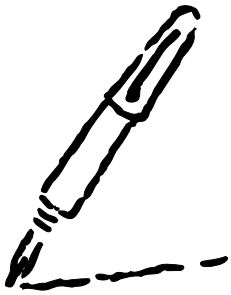

Structured Interview

- Interviewer explores certain predetermined areas
- Interviewer has a predetermined description of experience, skills, and personality traits
- This type of interview is ***VERY*** common

> Sometimes referred to as a patterned interview, this type of interview is very straightforward. The interviewer has a standard set of questions that are asked of all candidates. This makes it easier for the interviewer to evaluate and compare candidates. The main purpose of a structured interview is to pinpoint job skills that are essential to the position.

Developing thought-provoking questions involves a careful and thorough analysis of the position, to determine the core competencies required. The interviewer will probably collaborate with other department heads to ensure important skills and qualifications are covered. These may include skills such as verbal and written communication, decision-making, consensus-building, time management, honesty, team-building, and interpersonal skills. Many organizations will give each candidate a score using a specially planned rating scale (For example: a 1 to 10 scale). Questions can be situational, observational, and personal - this depends on the position and the interviewer.

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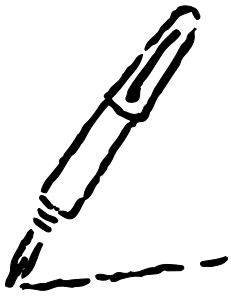

Unstructured Interview

- **Interviewer still has a description of the "ideal" candidate**
- **Specific areas to cover are not predetermined**
- **The flow may lead anywhere and may be taken into consideration by the interviewer**
- **Can lead to a more conversational tone**
- **Not as common as the structured interview**

  An informal discussion that has no strict guidelines, allowing the discussion to be open and not necessarily concise in its nature.

  - Advantages

    Unstructured interviews are good in the initial stages of the project as they provide a general understanding of the problem. The knowledge engineer observes and probably audio/video tapes the expert in the course of performing tasks. These records are searched for key variables, rules and the order of approach taken during problem-solving. The expert is not required to give explanations and justifications for every decision taken. There is less pressure on the expert and he/she can be spontaneous with the answers.

  - Disadvantages

    It is more like a conversation dominated by the expert but initiated by a question. The information from the expert may be vast and too unrelated for the engineer to unravel. There is a temptation on the part of the expert to discuss more unusual and different areas that he/she deals with, whereas the primary purpose of the interview is to con cencentrate on the central issues. They also tend to be time consuming and difficult to analyze, so it is usual to move to a structured interview or special method once the knowledge engineer is reasonably sure of his/her ground.

An example of an expert system that would use structured interviews could be:- If interviewing an expert for building a heart problem diagnostic programme then the questions would have to be structured in order to get specific answers.

Targeted Interview

Although similar to the structured interview, the areas covered are much more limited. Key qualifications for success on the job are identified and relevant questions are prepared in advance.

- Similar to the structured interview
- Areas and topics covered are more limited
- Key qualifications are identified

Relevant questions are prepared in advance

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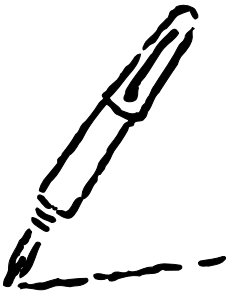

Multiple Interviews

- Commonly used with professional jobs
- Series of interviews
- First interviews may focus more on specific skills and abilities
- Afterwards, interviewers meet and pool their thoughts together regarding the candidate

Multiple interviews are commonly used with professional jobs. This approach involves a series of interviews in which you meet individually with various representatives of the organization. In the initial interview, the representative usually attempts to get basic information on your skills and abilities. In subsequent interviews, the focus is on how you would perform the job in relation to the company's goals and objectives. After the interviews are completed, the interviewers meet and pool their information about your qualifications for the job. A variation on this approach involves a series of interviews in which unsuitable candidates are screened out at each succeeding level.

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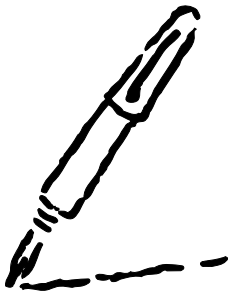

Situational Interview

Situations are set up which simulate common problems you may encounter on the job. Your responses to these situations are measured against pre-determined standards. This approach is often used as one part of a traditional interview rather than as an entire interview format

- Set up to simulate common problems you may encounter on the job
- Your Response vs. Pre-Determined Standards

Often used as part of an interview.

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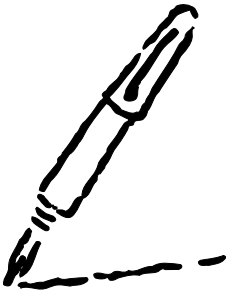

Stress Interview

- The interviewer intentionally attempts to upset you to see how you react under pressure
- You may be asked questions that make you uncomfortable or you may be interrupted when you are speaking
- Although it is uncommon for an entire interview to be conducted under stress conditions, it is common for the interviewer to incorporate stress questions as part of the traditional interview

A stress interview is just another part of the job search you must be prepared for, if you want to get a job offer.

Here is how it happens. Soon after you sit down, relax, and are asked a few basic or introductory questions, the interviewer starts rapidly firing tough questions at you, sometimes in a hostile tone of voice. The interviewer may start challenging or criticizing everything you say. Under normal circumstances, this would be considered rude and ignorant and you would feel mortified and defensive, but if you are prepared, you will shine in this situation.

The interviewer is testing you to see how you act under pressure. The ability to handle this sort of pressure is a must for many positions, especially those that involve working in the public eye with demanding clients (a "pressure cooker" environment). Don't make the mistake of taking this personally - stand your ground and do not let yourself be intimidated. Look upon this as an opportunity to rise to the challenge and respond in a level-headed, confident, and professional manner.

Whatever you do, do not match the attitude of the interviewer by becoming defensive and argumentative.

The reason this method is used so frequently is that it gets results. It gives the interviewer a realistic sense of the candidate's response to difficult situations, which would not be possible through a standard set of questions.

You will notice that the interviewer reverts to his or her original demeanour after the interrogation. He or she was only doing a job: trying to disqualify candidates who are not able to handle pressure.

The best way to handle a stress interview is to anticipate and prepare thoroughly for it, so that responding becomes natural. This is where a Career Coach can really help you - call us to help you practice.

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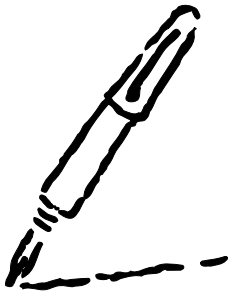

Group Interview

- You may be interviewed by two or more agency representatives simultaneously
- Sometimes, one of the interviewers is designated to ask “stress” questions to see how you respond under pressure
- A variation of this format is for two or more representatives to interview a group of candidates at the same time

The simplest form of group interview is little more than a presentation about the company conducting it, perhaps with open discussions and question and answer sessions. It's also the company's chance to initially screen candidates, by observing how individuals behave and stand out among their peers. Interviewers will likely also observe

- Communication skills

Group interaction and participation

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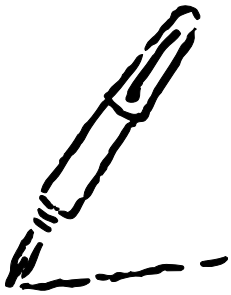
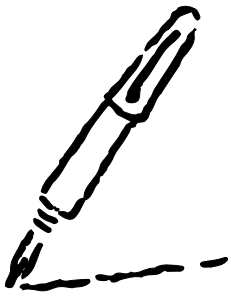


The Succesful Job Search

Watch "What's in a Job Interview?" (20 minutes)

Capture your notes here about the video



Before The Interview

- **Learn about the agency and its operation such as:**
- **Name of the interviewer**
- **Organizational structure**
- **Divisions/departments that interest you**
- **Training programs**
- **Career paths**
- **Growth in the past and future potential**

Research Yourself

This may sound funny, but researching yourself is an important part of any interview. Examining your interests, abilities, education, experience, values, and goals is the best way to prepare for the interview. Self-assessment is the best way to know your strengths and weaknesses. Many of the most difficult interview questions can be answered with an understanding of who you are, what your goals are, and where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Be prepared to discuss concrete examples of things you have done in the past, whether on the job or in school.

Research the Company

Employers look for those who show an interest and an understanding of their business. It may assist you to become knowledgeable about the company to which you are applying. Researching the company meets two needs. First it allows you to evaluate whether or not you want to work there. A company often sounds promising but after researching it you might find out that it is not a good fit with your interests and professional goals.

The interview process is your chance to sell yourself. Knowing as much about the company as possible shows that you are interested in the position and working for the company.

Practice the Interview

The age-old adage, "practice makes perfect," applies to interviewing. Practicing helps you to feel more familiar and thus more comfortable and natural with the interview process. Try getting friends or family to help you out. They can often be a good source, since they know you the best.

Resources to obtain the information:

- Agency's annual report
- Information Interview
- Inside source
- Literature produced by agency
- Professional journals
- Magazine articles

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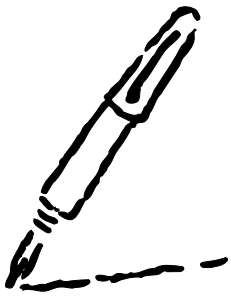

Before the Interview Tips

Tips:

- Remember the name of the interviewer
- Get a good night's sleep
- Decide what you will wear the day before
- Find out where you are going, parking, travel time
- Arrive 15 minutes early

Be friendly to receptionist/secretary

Do's

- Dress conservatively (similar to organization)
- Practice good grooming
- Carry a briefcase with extra copies of applications
- Bring a clean notepad and pen

Don'ts

- Wear torn, soiled, wrinkled clothing
- Dress casual
- Wear a lot of jewelry
- Wear a lot of perfume or cologne
- Wear heavy make-up
- Chew gum or smoke…even if interviewer does

During the Interview

- Be professional
- Be comfortable
- Listen attentively
- Speak clearly
- Avoid nervous mannerisms
- Be positive and enthusiastic
- Focus on your strengths
- Never whine, gripe, or complain
- Ask pertinent questions
- Don't ask about salary and benefits

After The Interview

- Stand up
- Write a thank you note
- Follow up
- Be persistent but appropriate
- Gear up for the next interviews

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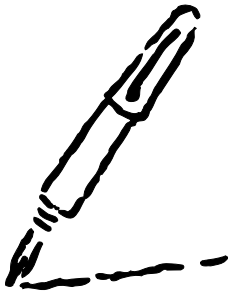

Interviewer's Hidden Agenda

- Listed are typical concerns that *interviewers* have:
- Does the applicant have the ability to do the job?
- How does he or she relate to people?
- What kind of person is this?
- What strengths does he or she have that we need?
- Why has there been a number of job changes?
- In what areas is he or she weak?
- What contributions has the applicant made?
- What will former/present supervisors & co-workers say about the applicant?

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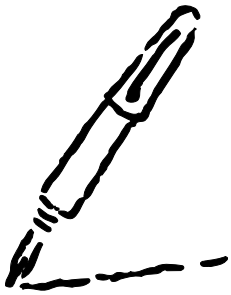

Common Interview Questions From The Employer

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Why should I hire you?
- What could you offer our agency?
- What do you know about our agency?
- What can we offer that your previous agency could not offer?
- Why have you been unemployed so long?
- Where do you see yourself in the next five years?

Questions To Ask During The Interview

- **What are your agency's greatest strengths?**
- **In what areas are you trying to improve?**
- **Who will I report to?**
- **What are some examples of projects I would be working on?**
- **What kind of assignments could I expect in the first 6 months?**
- **How much travel is involved?**
- **What qualities are you looking for in a candidate?**
- **Could you describe your career development program?**

Illegal / Inappropriate Interview Questions

- **Most interviewers do not purposely ask illegal questions**
- **Your challenge is to figure out your response**
- **You have three options:**
  - **Just answer the question**
  - **Refuse to answer the question**
  - **Don't answer the question, but answer the intent behind the question**
- **Questions that employers ask during a job interview should be directly related to your ability to perform the job that you are seeking.**
- **In general, employers should not ask questions in the following categories:**
- **Race**
- **Color**
- **Sex**
- **Religion**
- **National Origin**
- **Age**

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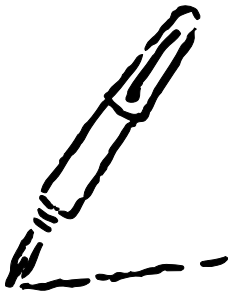

Final Interview Tips

- Remember that BODY LANGUAGE is an essential part of any interview
- Make eye contact
- Be “forward” thinking- lean forward during the interview
- Look attentive- don’t slouch in chair
- Laughter- feel free to laugh with interviewer, but don’t erupt into laughter on your own

Below is a list of traits compiled from surveys as to what employers are seeking:

Initiative	Leadership Skills
Communication Skills	Cooperation
Interpersonal Skills	Dependability
Enthusiasm	High Energy Level
Maturity	Confidence
Flexibility	Creativity
Problem-Solving Ability	Organizational Skills

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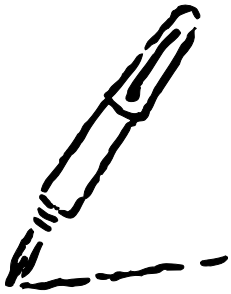

Interview Thank You Letter

- You should always write your thank you letter(s) soon after you have had an interview
- In this letter you should thank the interviewer(s) for meeting with you and if possible provide some additional information about yourself or a problem that the agency/department needed a solution for
- Let's review the example thank you letter found in your participant guide

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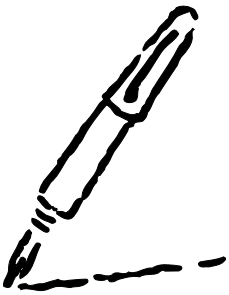

Contact Information for Elaine Poole

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