

What Happens During the Interview?

The interviewing process can be scary if you don't know what to expect. Most interviews tend to fit a general pattern and share three common characteristics: the beginning, middle and conclusion.

The typical interview for an entry-level position will last 30 minutes, although some may be longer. A typical structure is as follows:

- Five minutes – small talk
- Fifteen minutes – discussion of your background and credentials as they relate to the needs of the employer
- Five minutes – asks you for questions
- Five minutes – conclusion

As you can see, there's not much time to state your case. The employer may try to do most of the talking. When you do respond to questions or ask your own, your statements should be concise and organized without being too brief.

It Starts Before You Even Say Hello

The typical interview starts before you even get into the employers office or interview room. The employer begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified. You are expected to shake the interviewers hand upon being introduced. Don't be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness.

It is a good idea to arrive at least 15-20 minutes early. You can use the time to relax and look over notes you've prepared. Once you arrive remember to look at yourself in a mirror to make sure you are all together.

How's Your Small Talk Vocabulary?

Many employers will begin the interview with small talk. Topics may range from the weather to sports and will rarely focus on anything that brings out your skills. Nonetheless, you're still being evaluated.

Recruiters are trained to evaluate candidates on many different points. They may be judging how well you communicate on an informal basis. You must do more than just smile and nod.

The Recruiter Has the Floor

The main part of the interview starts when the employer begins discussing the organization. If the interviewer is vague about the position and you want more specific information ask questions. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job and the company. With on-campus interviewing, employers may schedule an Employer Informational Session expecting all candidates interviewing to attend. At that session, the employer will share company information so your scheduled interview may be dedicated to you.

As the discussion turns to your qualifications, be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative, e.g., low grade-point average, no participation in outside activities, no related work experience. It is up to you to convince the recruiter that although these points appear negative, positive attributes can be found in them. A low GPA could stem from having to fully support yourself through college; you might have no related work experience, but plenty of experience that shows you to be a loyal and valued employee.

Many times recruiters will ask why you chose the major you did or what your career goals are. These questions are designed to determine your goal direction. Employers seek people who have direction and motivation, which can be demonstrated by your answers to the innocent-sounding questions.

It's Your Turn to Ask Questions

When the recruiter asks, "Now do you have any questions?" it's important to have a few ready. Dr. C. Randall Powell, author of "Career Planning Today," believes that questions should elicit positive responses from the employer. Also, the questions should bring out your interest in and knowledge of the organization.

By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show the employer you are serious about the organization and need more information. It indicates that you have done your homework.

Expect the Unexpected

During the interview, you may be asked some unusual questions. Don't be too surprised. Many times questions are asked simply to see how you react.

The employer will evaluate your reaction time and the response you give, but there's no way to anticipate questions like these. While these questions are not always used, they are intended to force you to react under some stress and pressure. The best advice is to think and give a natural response.

The Close Counts, Too

The interview is not over until you walk out the door. The conclusion usually lasts 5 minutes and is very important. During this time the employer is assessing your overall performance.

It is important to remain enthusiastic and courteous. Often the conclusion of the interview is indicated when the employer stands up. However, if you believe the interview has reached its conclusion, feel free to stand up first.

Shake the employer's hand and thank him/ her for considering you. Being forthright is a quality that most employers will respect, indicating that you believe you have presented your case and the decision is now up to the employer.

Evaluations Made by Recruiters

Remember that the employer will be observing and evaluating you throughout the interview. Erwin S. Stanton, author of "Successful Personnel Recruiting and Selection," indicated some evaluations made by the employer during the interview include:

1. How mentally alert and responsive is the job candidate?
 2. Is the applicant able to draw proper inferences and conclusions during the interview?
 3. Does the applicant demonstrate a degree of intellectual depth when communicating, or is his/her thinking shallow and lacking depth?
 4. Has the candidate used good judgment and common sense regarding life planning?
 5. What is the applicant's capacity for problem-solving activities?
 6. How well does the candidate respond to stress and pressure?
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