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INTerview Prep Checklist

- **Thoroughly review the job description**
  Determine the specific skills required and major responsibilities.

- **Research the employer**
  Perform a detailed search to demonstrate your awareness of activity in both the employer and the field. Be prepared to discuss active projects, major initiatives and current trends.

- **Develop a brief narrative to address the statement, “tell me about yourself.”**
  Be able to articulate your strengths, previous accomplishments and how previous work experience and education is relevant to the target position.

- **Develop value propositions**
  Propose how you can potentially benefit the company.

- **Develop stories that demonstrate both success in previous positions as well as obstacles/challenges you’ve faced and how you overcame them**
  Practice reciting these anecdotes.

- **Prepare a list of questions to ask during the interview**

- **Conduct a mock interview through career services**

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**Scheduling a Mock Interview**

**How it works:**
CPS Career Services has partnered with InterviewStream™ to offer our students and alumni the latest in virtual mock interview technology. This service will allow you to: conduct and record virtual mock interviews from any space with an internet connection and a webcam, review practice interview recordings with structured self-assessment, and receive constructive feedback on your recorded interview from CPS Career Services during a scheduled advising session.

**To get started:**
Visit: [www.interviewstream.com](http://www.interviewstream.com) You’ll need to first click “Create Account” (you must use your GW email address)

Once on the InterviewStream™ home page, get started with the Interview Webinar, Expert Tips and Tutorial that walks you through the virtual mock interview process.
Congratulations, you’ve landed an interview. While your resume showcases the skills and experience required for the job, a successful interview will convince the employer you are the best candidate. Careful preparation is crucial. The following guide is designed to help achieve a successful interview. Career Services offers additional opportunities to enhance your interviewing skills through individual consultations and mock interviews.

**Scheduling the Interview**

When the employer contacts you with details of the interview be sure to ask for an agenda. It should include the following items:

- The location where your interview will take place
- The names and titles of individuals conducting the interview
  
  *Tip: You can ask for clarification as to how these individuals relate to the position you’re interviewing for, if it’s not easily apparent.*
- The scheduled format (e.g. individual and/or panel interviews) and duration of your interview

For some positions, you may be required to deliver a presentation or complete an assessment. It is important to know exactly what will be expected of you during the interview to successfully prepare.

**Know Yourself**

Prior to your interview thoroughly review your resume. Everything listed on your resume is fair game for exploration. Make sure you are prepared to discuss all items in full detail. Additionally, conduct a self-assessment to answer the following questions:

- How has your previous work experience and education prepared you for the position?
- What are your most significant career accomplishments?
- What are your reasons for leaving previous jobs?
- What specific skills do you want to highlight during the interview?
- What personal attributes do you want to promote?
- What are your career goals and how does this position fit in to your overall career plan?

**Google yourself prior to the interview**

Imagine yourself in the employer’s shoes. You’re about to interview a candidate and have limited information beyond the resume. Where would you go to find out more about this individual? Most likely, Google is your answer. If potential employers Google you, what information will be revealed? Further, what images appear? If you don’t like the results from your own search, take preventative steps to clean up your web presence. Conversely, if you can’t find anything, consider developing a professional LinkedIn profile to increase your search engine optimization. Additionally, a web portfolio using Blogger, Wordpress or Weebly can enhance your visibility.
Research the Company

During the interview, you’ll want to demonstrate to the employer that you have done your homework. Peruse the employer’s website and use the Internet to obtain the following information:

- History of the organization
- Mission statement
- Business philosophy and values
- Organizational structure and leadership
- Size and locations
- Recent developments and growth
- Current projects that interest you
- Products and services provided
- Clients/customers

Using Social Media Sites

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube provide useful information that does not typically appear on the employer's website. Through social media, you can access the following information:

- New hires and recent promotions within the company (LinkedIn)
- Where employers came from prior to joining the company (LinkedIn)
- Company updates and current hiring needs (LinkedIn & Facebook)
- What others across the world are saying about the company in real time (Twitter)
- Up to the minute insights and opinions from individuals working at your target employer (Twitter)

Use social media sites to successfully prepare for your next interview!

Career Services is available to help prepare you with the necessary social media skills for conducting an effective employer search. Schedule an appointment through GWork CPS.
THE INTERVIEW

Dress Attire
Dress codes vary across industries and organizations from conservative to casual. As a general rule you should wear business attire to a job interview. Traditional business attire is defined as a suit. For men the ideal is a dark, conservative suit and a white, long-sleeved, dress shirt. Traditional business attire for women is a conservative pants or skirt suit that hits at or within an inch of the knees. Hosiery and closed shoes should be worn. For men and women, shoes should be polished and coordinate with your suit. Less is more- avoid heavy cologne or perfume and wear minimal jewelry.

For detailed information regarding professional dress attire, including sample outfits, visit our Pinterest page: http://pinterest.com/cpscareerserv/

What to Bring
✓ Additional copies of your resume (enough to provide one to each person you meet)
✓ A pen and padfolio
✓ Several copies of your reference list
✓ Samples of your work (if applicable)

Managing the Interview
✓ First impressions count
  Offer a firm handshake and smile as you greet people
✓ Be engaging and always speak positively about past experiences
✓ Don’t talk on your cell phone in the waiting area
✓ Treat everyone you come into contact with the same level of respect
  People will talk after the interview and one person’s opinion could drastically sway your hiring decision
✓ Be aware of your body language
  Excess hand gestures, poor eye contact, folded arms, etc. may all send negative signals
✓ Make sure you obtain contact information from everyone involved in the interview
  You will want to send “Thank You” notes afterwards and don’t want to leave anyone out.

Ending the Interview
As your time draws to a close and the employer asks you if you have any additional questions, use the opportunity to reinforce or summarize your ability to successfully carry out the position. Like an attorney in a court proceeding, offering a concluding remark shows your ability to synthesize all of the information presented in the interview and logically articulate why you are the right candidate. You can state by saying, “based on our conversation, it appears you are looking for someone…”. Proceed to highlight attributes the employer has articulated during the Interview and briefly reference how you possess these.
As you go through this sheet, think about crafting answers that follow the STAR method. STAR stands for Situation (S), Task (T), Action (A) and Result (R). This method works whether the question is posed as behavioral (“Given me an example of when you…”) or general (“What is your weakness?”). The idea is to set the context (“I was given a case that involved a unfamiliar area of law”), explain your task (“I was designated as the point person for substantive legal questions on the team”), state your action (“I researched the legal topic, talking to other lawyers in the firm with a level of expertise for advice”), and give the result (“I became well-versed in the field and was able to successfully advise other team members”). Remember that past performance or action is the best predictor of future success, so answering a question with specific examples is the clearest way to prove your ability to do the job.

Interviewing is a learned skill. The more you practice, the better you will become. Below are commonly asked interview questions and topics. Carefully review these sample questions and work towards developing responses that are tailored to your target position. Where applicable, incorporate your own strengths and skills to further demonstrate your “fit” for the employer.

**Personal & Professional**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- Why are you leaving/did you leave your current job?
- Who else are you interviewing with?
- Have you done anything you regret at work?
- Why should we hire you?
- What are your career goals?
- What is your five year plan?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- What kind of work interests you?

**Academic**

- What led you to go back to school to get a degree?
- How did you choose your major?
- What is your G.P.A.?
- Do you think grades are an accurate indicator of job performance?
- What was the most difficult class you completed?
- What course(s) did you like most? Least?
- Did you participate in any extracurricular activities?

**General tips:**

- Listen carefully to the question. Ask for clarification, if necessary.
- Avoid responding with simple yes/no answers.
- Provide specific examples of your experience.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Always tell the truth and avoid telling jokes.
- Avoid “cookie cutter” or generic answers. Show breath and depth in your responses.
- Avoid discussing too much personal information.
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Employer and Job Specific
✓ Why are you interested in this position?
✓ What do you know about our company?
✓ What do you think it takes to be successful in our organization?
✓ How will you add value to our company?
✓ What is your geographic preference?

Personal & Professional
✓ Tell me about yourself.
✓ What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
✓ What do you do in your free time?
✓ What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
✓ Why are you leaving/did you leave your current job?
✓ Why should we hire you?
✓ What is your five year career plan?

Behavioral
✓ Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with a colleague and how you handled it.
✓ Tell me about the most difficult person with whom you have worked.
✓ Tell me about a time you felt overwhelmed at work and how you handled it.
✓ Tell me about a recent situation when you had to work closely with a group or team that had low morale.
✓ Tell me about a time when your supervisor was unavailable and you had to solve an immediate problem.
✓ Have you ever disagreed with your supervisor(s)? How did you handle that?
✓ Describe your most challenging assignment/project.
✓ Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
✓ When you delegate assignments, how do you keep track of their progress?
✓ Tell me about a time when you showed initiative and took the lead.
✓ What is the biggest mistake you’ve made at work? What did you learn from this experience?
What are your weaknesses?

This is a question that can rattle even the most savvy interviewees. Fortunately, there are no right or wrong answers, but there are plenty of bad ones. Nobody is perfect and we all have weaknesses. The key is to identify something about yourself that is not detrimental to performing the job at hand. For example, if you are interviewing for a position that has management responsibilities and you reference a lack of previous supervisory experience, it’s safe to say you probably will not get the job.

With this question, try to be honest and own up to your deficiencies. Prior to the interview, solicit feedback from your colleagues. For example, you might ask former or current supervisors what areas you need to improve or further develop. As you prepare for the interview, carefully think about how you will address these weaknesses in your next position. After all, it’s better for you to first address weaknesses or problems during the interview than have any potentially damaging information about you come out when your future employer checks references.

STAR METHOD for Interviewing

Craft your interview responses using the STAR method: (S) Situation, (T) Task, (A) Action and (R) Result.

This structured method demonstrates critical thinking and provides the interviewer with rich detailed information they can use to positively evaluate you. Remember that past performance is the best predictor of future success, so answering a question with specific examples is the clearest way to prove your ability to do the job.

Below is an example of the STAR method applied in response to the following interview question:

Tell me about a time when you worked with a team where one of the members failed to complete the required tasks.

**Situation**
During my senior year, I completed a marketing internship at XYZ in New York City. I worked alongside three other interns and two marketing analysts. We all worked under the direction of the firm’s marketing director.

**Task**
A few weeks into the internship, our group was tasked with developing a strategy to decrease the company’s domestic marketing expenditures by 10%. All of the interns were responsible for working with the analyst to examine the ROI of each of the firm’s major product lines, relative to marketing expenditures.

**Action**
Shortly into this project, I noticed that one of the other interns, Joe, was not generating data. The third intern was not too pleased and voiced her frustration. Rather than finger pointing, I asked Joe directly if something was preventing him from collecting the data. He told me that he felt overwhelmed and wasn’t exactly sure how to extract the data. I suggested that he contact one of the company’s senior financial analysts for some additional guidance.

**Result**
It took him a few days to work up the nerve, but he finally approached Kim and asked for advice. It turns out Kim had compiled reports earlier that year with the exact data Roger needed to run a cost analysis. In the end, we were able to adapt a new marketing strategy that cut sales costs by 20%, exceeding our initial goals.
Interviewing is meant to be a two way exchange of information. In addition to proving yourself the best candidate, you should be evaluating the position and opportunity to see if it’s the right fit for you. Asking questions allows you to engage the interviewer and supply you with information to help evaluate the opportunity, if an offer is presented to you. Employers will expect you to ask questions. Try to prepare more questions than you think you will ask. If you’re scheduled to meet with a variety of people during your interview, prepare a diverse list of questions so as not to appear too one dimensional and narrowly focused.

Questions to Ask Your Potential Supervisor

✓ What are your expectations for me for the first 90 days? Year?
✓ How do you measure success?
✓ What are the biggest challenges I can expect to face in this role?
✓ When do you expect to make the official hiring decision?
✓ What is the criteria for promotion?
✓ What opportunity for growth does this position offer?

Avoid the following:

- Asking a question where the answer can be found with a basic search of the employer’s website.
- Asking about salary. During the initial interview focus on conveying your enthusiasm in the opportunity, rather than focusing on salary and benefits.

It is also important to know if you are directly competing with internal candidates for the job. If you are offered the position over these insiders, will there be resentment towards you from the beginning? You need to be aware towards potentially entered a dysfunctional work environment. Simply asking if there are internal candidates being considered will provide some clarity.

Questions to Ask Future Colleagues

✓ How would you characterize the culture here?
✓ What have you found to be the most rewarding thing about working here?
✓ What is it like working for (future supervisor)?
✓ Are there opportunities for employees to interact outside work?

Questions to Ask Future Subordinates

If you are interviewing for a position that is directly responsible for supervising others, expect to be evaluated by these individuals for your potential as a future boss. These individuals will be looking to you as a potential mentor for career guidance. Don’t lose sight of this during the interview. Be prepared to discuss your management philosophy and consider asking the following questions:

✓ What are your career plans?
✓ Were you interested in this position?
✓ How would you characterize the working relationship with your previous supervisor?
As you begin crafting answers for the questions above follow the STAR method. STAR stands for Situation (S), Task (T), Action (A) and Result (R). This method works whether the question is posed as behavioral (“Given me an example of when you…”) or general (“What is your weakness?”). The idea is to set the context (“I was given a case that involved an unfamiliar area of law”), explain your task (“I was designated as the point person for substantive legal questions on the team”), state your action (“I researched the legal topic, talking to other lawyers in the firm with a level of expertise for advice”), and give the result (“I became well-versed in the field and was able to successfully advise other team members”). Remember that past performance or action is the best predictor of future success, so answering a question with specific examples is the clearest way to prove your ability to do the job.

Phone and video conference technology offers employers an inexpensive means to preliminary screen and interview large numbers of candidates for open positions. You should approach these types of interviews with the same level of professionalism as you would a face-to-face interview.

**Tips for Phone Interviews**

- **Pick a quiet location, free of distractions.** If you field a phone call from a potential employer while at work proceed with caution. If it’s not a convenient time to talk or you lack privacy, ask if you can call the employer back from a quiet location free of potential distractions. Also, be aware of your surroundings. You do not want to compete with an emergency siren in the background or drop the call if your Metro train passes underground.

- **Have a copy of your resume on hand.** Doing so will help guarantee you don’t botch employment dates and key accomplishments from previous positions. You can also print out a cheat sheet with talking points you want to stress.

- **Stand up.** It opens your airways and allows you to speak less softly.

- **Smile.** It comes through in your voice!

- **Don’t volunteer too much information.** Unlike an in-person interview, a phone conversation reduces your ability to pick up on the interviewers non-verbal queues. If you are ever uncertain as to whether you’ve satisfied the interviewer’s question, you can ask, “would you like more detail?”

- **Don’t interrupt or cut off the interviewer.** Wait until the question is fully asked before you chime in with your response.

- **Inquire about next steps.** At the conclusion of the call thank the interviewer and ask when you can expect to hear back.

- **Ask for an email address.** Without one, you won’t be able to send a ‘Thank You’ note.

**Tips for Video Conference Interviews (e.g. Skype)**

- **Do a trial run.** Download the necessary software in advance and test your equipment before hand.

- **Dress as if it were an in-person interview.** Appearing in your pajamas for an afternoon interview does not necessarily convey a go-getter image.

- **Position your camera at eye level and avoid too much backlighting.** Avoid too much shuffling during the interview and maintain eye contact. Talk directly into the camera.

- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Choose a professional backdrop and be careful what may appear within the shot. Conversely, you can manipulate the setting to your advantage. Show a tidy and professional workspace.

- **Discuss a back-up plan for handling potential technical difficulties.** At the beginning, ask the interviewer what to do if the connection is interrupted. Make sure you have an accessible phone line and fully charged cell phone.
**Panel Interviews**

The following pointers will help you prepare for your panel interview:

- **Research the panelists. and develop a list of questions specific to each person.** If you’ve done your homework, you’ll be able to formulate specific questions for each individual, thereby helping to build rapport amongst the group.

- **Respond directly to each question.** When one of the individuals asks you a question be sure to direct most of your attention to this individual. Maintain eye contact and casually scan the room to observe the reaction of others.

- **Don’t let one person throw you off.** If one person appears distracted or disinterested, resist the tendency to focus all of your attention to this one individual. It could be that this individual is having a bad day or always appears disinterested.

- **Take notes.** If you’ve spoken to several individuals during your interview it may be difficult to discern who said what at the end of the day. Taking notes during an interview will allow you to reference specific information. You can use this to further personalize your ‘Thank You’ notes more effectively.

- **Ask a question that engages the entire group.** Try to ask at least one question that requires input from everyone in the room (e.g. “What is the best part about working for this organization?”).

- **Ask for business cards.** As previously noted, you’ll want to send a ‘Thank You’ note either collectively or to the group, or to each individual interviewer. To avoid leaving anyone out make sure you have the proper contact information.

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**Panel interviews provide a window into company culture.**

Panel interviews offer a unique interviewing format that bring together multiple individuals from the same organization (often the same group). If you were to meet these individuals on a one-to-one basis you might not get the same level of insight into the team’s culture. During the panel be sure to take note of the following:

- How do the individuals interact with each other?
- Do these individuals act differently when the boss is in the room?
- Does it appear to be a collegial environment or are these individuals hostile towards one another?
- Is everyone treated with the same level of respect?

Overall, does it look like a healthy work environment where everyone’s opinion is valued? Remember all these insights when you are presented with the offer.
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Thank-You Correspondence

Within one to two business days, send a personalized email or hand written card to the interviewer(s). This note can serve as more than just a common courtesy. You can use the opportunity to:

- highlight specific things about the company you admire.
- reinforce your interest by responding to a problem the organization is facing.
- outline goals you hope to achieve, if you took the position.
- restate or expand upon any of your skills.

Email or handwritten note? How many ‘Thank You’ notes are sufficient?

Most candidates today will use email, rather than a hand written card, to follow-up with an employer after the interview. If you want to stand out from the crowd try sending both. Think of the email as the more strategic of the two. For example, in the email you can address specific attributes of the interview (and incorporate the above suggestions). In the hand written card you can simply thank the employer for the invitation and allocating time to meet with you. Greeting cards are fairly inexpensive and can leave a lasting impression upon a potential employer.

Candidates often wrestle with the decision of how many ‘Thank You’ notes to send. A simple rule of thumb is to send a note to everyone who was part of the interview process. Yes, this can be time consuming particularly if you’ve met with a large number of people. However, it helps personalize the process. Also, some employers may get offended if a ‘Thank You’ note of some kind is not received. An alternative to sending individual notes is to send a single email addressed that CC’s all individuals. You could also send one email, but include a brief personal note for each person. In the event you forgot to obtain email addresses during the interview, ask the individual that set the interview up for you for any missing information.

Check-in with Your References

While the interview is still fresh in your mind, take the opportunity to contact your references. If the employer is interested in moving forward in making you an offer, references will first need to checked. Letting your references know that you are enthusiastically continuing to pursue the opportunity can help ensure they respond to the potential employer’s request in a timely fashion.