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# **Job Interview Preparation Tips**

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## I. How to Create a Resume

Your resume is your ambassador to the work world. It functions for you 24 hours a day, opening doors to opportunities you did not even know existed. However, not all resumes are alike or are used alike today with all the electronic means available to reach your potential employer. Here are the most important issues to consider as you prepare your resume to represent you:

1. Write your resume in your own words. It may be challenging but writing your own resume ensures that you'll be sharp in your interview. If you do ask someone to help you, work closely with that person to be sure your resume realistically reflects your abilities and your vocabulary.
2. Put your best foot forward. People remember what they see first and last, so place your least important information in the middle. The jury is still out on objective statements—some would say that it's redundant to apply for a position in a union and then begin your resume with a statement that outlines your desire and drive to work in a college union.
3. Tell war stories. Make a list of all the work or volunteer experiences you have had that support your candidacy for the job. Select the best ones and write them so that they show what **P**roblems you've solved, **A**ctions you've taken to do this, and the bottom line **R**esults you've achieved. In other words, show the reader that you're up to **PAR**.
4. Use resume etiquette. The word "resume" does not belong any place on the document. Never use "I" to start a sentence. The language of your resume should be specific, clear, succinct, positive, and exciting. Make it easy for someone to contact you. Of course references are available—do not use valuable resume real estate to say this.
5. Know what format to use. The two most commonly used and accepted resume formats are the chronological and the functional. Often elements of both are combined. A chronological resume is most widely used and preferred by recruiters and interviewers. It is good for someone with a consistent work history. A functional resume focuses attention on your accomplishments and is often used more successfully if you are trying to change careers or functional areas.
6. Tell the truth. If you lie about your education, job experience or any other element of your work history, you will probably live to regret it. On the other hand, if a job title you had does not adequately reflect the work you really did, clarify it. "Program Assistant" does not tell the scope of responsibilities as well as "Student Union Board Advisor."
7. Know your audience. Your resume and every interaction in your job search should answer the question to the employer - "Why should I hire you?" Communicate the information necessary to evaluate your ability to do the job. Use language that is appropriate to the field. Consider answering questions like, "How does a union serve students?" and "I believe students develop best when..."
8. Get some objective feedback. Have others who have not worked as closely with the resume as you read it for accuracy and typographical errors before you submit it. Ask questions about whether the resume communicates what you intended. Does your resume support your claim of being qualified for the job? Does it address the requirements of a specific job description you are after? Does it need to be modified to fit the situation exactly?
9. Know your parts of speech. Action verbs are the bedrock of good writing. Use them liberally throughout your resume to communicate your accomplishments: Developed, streamlined, pioneered, implemented, produced - use your word processor's thesaurus to identify alternatives so that you do not need to repeat yourself. Use them consistently and in the correct tense: current job deserves present tense verbs, past jobs should use past tense verbs.
10. Hit the highlights. Remember that your resume is only one element of your job search strategy. It's important and needs to get you in the door, yet cover letters, email and fax communications and

telephone interactions will extend the conversation and add further evidence of your ability to do the job. Be prepared to give more detail later. Think of your resume as your personal brochure.

Things to consider:

Update your resume often.

Use "bullet" format where appropriate.

Use conventional English.

Stay away from multi-syllable words when a one- or two-syllable word is clearer.

Use short paragraphs -- preferably no longer than five lines.

Make sure the resume and the cover letter are error-free.

Proofread, and have others proofread too.

Rewrite a resume for a specific position. It's extra work but may very well pay off.

Include your significant contributions at each one of your jobs.

Allow the most space for the positions that are most relevant to the position you are applying for.

List your activity with professional associations (ACUI, ACPA, NASPA, etc) -- but only if they are appropriate.

Keep a permanent file of your achievements, no matter how inconsequential they may appear to be. This is the basis for a good resume.

Give each of your references a copy of your resume.

Re-read your resume before every interview -- chances are the interviewer did just that, too.

Send your resume in the timeliest manner possible. Fax or e-mail your resume whenever possible.

Things to consider *not* doing:

Give reasons for termination or leaving a job. In almost all cases, the reader can find negative connotations to even the best explanation.

List hobbies, sports and social activities unless absolutely related to the job you're applying for.

Include in your experience technologies for which you have no work experience.

State "References Available on Request." It's assumed, and only clutters up the resume. Other things to leave out include your Social Security number, your partner's occupation, your age, veteran status, etc.

Use exact dates. Months and years are sufficient.

Include the date your resume was prepared. If your search takes longer than a few months, the resume will appear outdated.

Include your current employer's telephone number unless your immediate supervisor is aware of your departure.

Include your height, weight or remarks about your physical appearance or health.

List your high school or grammar school.

State your objectives on your resume unless the resume is targeted to that position or occupation.

Use professional jargon unless you are sure someone who understands the buzzwords will read the resume.

Use the so-called "action words" like sparked, accelerated and streamlined. They are passe.

Provide salary information on the resume. Save it for the interview. If you are required to give that information, reveal it in the cover letter.

Lie.

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## II. How to Prepare for an Interview

Watching an Olympic skater perform with ease on ice, you might be fooled into thinking, "Looks simple and effortless." What you do not see are the years of preparation that brought this athlete into form. Great interviews arise, likewise, from careful groundwork. You can ace your next interview if you:

1. Enter a state of relaxed concentration. This is the state from which great tennis players or basketball players or Olympic skaters operate. You will need to quiet the negative self-chatter in your head through meditation or visualization before sitting down in the meeting. You will focus on the present moment and will be less apt to experience lapses in concentration, nervousness, self-doubt and self-condemnation.
2. Act spontaneous, but be well prepared. Be your authentic self, professional yet real. Engage in true conversation with your interviewer, resting on the preparation you did before coming to the meeting. Conduct several trial runs with another person simulating the interview before it actually occurs. It is the same as anticipating the questions you will be asked on a final exam.
3. Set goals for the interview. It is your job to leave the meeting feeling secure that the interviewer knows as much as he or she possibly can about your skills, abilities, experience and achievements. If you sense there are misconceptions, clear them up before leaving. If the interviewer does not get around to asking you important questions, pose them yourself (diplomatically) and answer them. Do not leave the meeting without getting your own questions answered so that you have a clear idea of what you would be getting yourself into.
4. Know the question behind the question. Ultimately, every question boils down to, "Why should we hire you?" Be sure you answer that completely. Find a way to address fears if you sense they are present.
5. Follow up with an effective "thank you" letter. **Do not write this letter lightly.** It is another opportunity to market yourself. Find some areas discussed in the meeting and expand upon them in your letter. Writing a letter after a meeting is a very minimum. Standing out among the other candidates will occur if you thoughtfully consider this follow up letter as an additional interview in which you get to do all the talking. Propose useful ideas that demonstrate your benefit to the team.
6. Consider the interviewer's agenda. Much is on the shoulders of the interviewer. He or she has the responsibility of hiring the right candidate. Your ability to do the job will need to be justified. "Are there additional pluses here?" "Will this person fit the culture of this organization?" These as well as other questions will be heavily on the interviewer's mind. Find ways to demonstrate your qualities beyond just doing the job.
7. Expect to answer the question, "Tell me about yourself." This is a pet question of prepared and even unprepared interviewers. Everything you include should answer the question, "Why should we hire you?" Carefully prepare your answer to include examples of achievements from your work life that closely match the elements of the job before you. Obviously, you will want to know as much about the job description as you can before you respond to the question.
8. Watch those nonverbal clues. Experts estimate that words express only 30% to 35% of what people actually communicate; facial expressions and body movements and actions convey the rest. Make and keep eye contact. Walk and sit with a confident air. Lean toward an interviewer to show interest and enthusiasm. Speak with a well-modulated voice that supports appropriate excitement for the opportunity before you.
9. Be smart about money questions. Do not fall into the trap of telling the interviewer your financial expectations. You may be asking for too little or too much money and in each case ruin your chances of being offered the job. Instead, ask what salary range the job falls in. Attempt to

postpone a money discussion until you have a better understanding of the scope of responsibilities of the job.

10. Do not hang out your dirty laundry. Be careful not to bare your soul and tell tales that are inappropriate or beyond the scope of the interview. State your previous experience in the most positive terms. Even if you disagreed with a former employer, express your enthusiasm for earlier situations as much as you can. Whenever you speak negatively about another person or situation in which you were directly involved, you run the risk (early in the relationship) of appearing like a troubled person who may have difficulty working with others.

#### Some Things to Consider About the Interview:

Plan to arrive on time or a few minutes early. Late arrival for a job interview is never excusable.

If presented with an application, fill it out neatly and completely.

Do not rely on your application or resume to do the selling for you. Interviewers will want you to speak for yourself.

Greet the interviewer by last name if you are sure of the pronunciation. If not, ask the employer to repeat it.

Give the appearance of energy as you walk. Smile! Shake hands firmly. Be genuinely glad to meet the interviewer.

Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting.

Sit upright, look alert and interested at all times.

Be a good listener as well as a good communicator.

Look a prospective employer in the eye while speaking.

Follow the interviewer's leads, but try to get the interviewer to describe the position and the duties to you early in the interview so that you can apply your background, skills and accomplishments to the position.

Make sure that your good points come across to the interviewer in a factual, sincere manner. Stress achievements.

Always conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing. Never close the door on opportunity.

Show enthusiasm. If you are interested in the opportunity, enthusiastic feedback can enhance your chances of being further considered.

Don't forget to bring a copy of your resume! Keep several copies on hand.

Do not smoke, even if the interviewer does and offers you a cigarette. Do not chew gum.

Do not answer with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain whenever possible.

Describe those things about yourself which relate to the situation.

Do not lie. Answer questions truthfully, frankly and succinctly.

Do not make unnecessary derogatory remarks about your present or former employers. Obviously, there were issues or else you would not have left a prior position or be looking to leave a present employer. However, when explaining your reasons for leaving, limit your comments to those necessary to adequately communicate your rationale.

Do not over-answer questions. If the interviewer steers the conversation into politics or controversial issues, try to do more listening than speaking since this could be a sensitive situation.

Do not inquire about salary, vacations, bonuses, retirement, etc. on the initial interview unless you are sure the employer is interested in hiring you.

If the interviewer asks what salary you want, indicate what you have earned but that you are more interested in opportunity than specific salary.

During the course of the interview, the interviewer will be assessing all aspects of your presentation. Listed below are *negative* factors frequently identified during the course of interviews that most often lead to rejection of a candidate:

- Personal appearance that is less than professional.
- Overbearing, overaggressive or egotistical behavior.
- No positive purpose.
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm -- a passive and indifferent attitude.
- Lack of confidence and poise; nervousness.
- Overemphasis on compensation.
- Evasiveness; making excuses for unfavorable factors in work history.
- Lack of tact, maturity and courtesy.
- Condemnation of past employers.
- Inability to maintain a conversation.
- Lack of commitment to fill the position at hand.
- Failure to ask questions about the position.
- Persistent attitude of "What can you do for me?"
- Lack of preparation for the interview -- failure to get information about the firm, resulting in inability to ask intelligent questions.

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### III. Possible Interview Questions

Perhaps one of the most important ways to prepare for an interview is to give serious thought to some of the questions that may be asked during the interview. Spend some time reflecting on these and other possible interview questions to be sure that you are at your best on the day of the interview.

[How do you handle conflict?](#)

[If you were on a merry-go-round, what song would be playing? If you were going to be an animal on the merry-go-round, what would you be?](#)

[In what way do you think you can contribute to our organization?](#)

[Tell me a story. Tell me about a time when you tried and failed.](#)

[Tell me about yourself.](#)

[Tell us about your analytical skills.](#)

[What are some of the things you find difficult to do?](#)

[What are your short and long term goals?](#)

[What can you add to what we have already asked you that should make us want to hire you?](#)

[What does "serving students" mean to you?](#)

[What do you wish to gain from this experience?](#)

[What do you know about our institution?](#)

[What is your biggest weakness?](#)

[What motivates you?](#)

[What things make a good team member?](#)

[Where do you see yourself in five years?](#)

[Why do you feel we should hire you for this position?](#)

[Why do you want to change jobs?](#)

What are your long range and short range goals and objectives?

What specific goals other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?

What do you really want to do in life?

How do you plan to achieve your career goals?

What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?

Why did you choose this career?

How would you describe yourself?

How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

How has your college experience prepared you for a career in higher education?

Why should I hire you?

What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

In what ways do you think you can contribute to our organization?

Describe the relationship that should exist between the supervisor and those reporting to him or her?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Describe your most rewarding college experience.

If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?

Why did you select your college or university?

What led you to choose your field or major study?

What college subject did you like best? Why?

What college subject did you like least? Why?

If you could do so, how would you plan your study differently? Why?

What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?

Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?

Do you think that your grades are a indication of your academic achievement?

What have you learned from participating in extra-curricular activities?

In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?

How do you work under pressure?

In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?

How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?

Why did you decide to seek a position at this institution?

What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

Are you looking to work in an institution of a certain size? Why?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?

Do you have a geographic preference? Why?

Are you willing to travel?

Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?

Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our institution is located?

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

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#### **IV. Telephone Interview Tips**

Interviewing over the telephone can be a daunting experience. All of the same rules apply, but here are some other tips we have gathered from some seasoned professionals in the field:

Take a framed photo of a friend and place it on the table in front of you. As you listen and respond, pretend that you are actually talking to the picture. Sometimes it helps to have someone to look at.

Dress just as you would for an interview. Looking good is half of feeling good which is half of making a good impression.

Use the same nonverbal cues that you would use in an in-person interview. People can see you smiling on the telephone.

If you have materials that you would like to refer to during the interview, spread them out. The last thing that an interviewer wants to hear is shuffling papers.

Write down the name(s) of the interviewer(s). Since you cannot look at them, you will have to use their name to get their attention.

Since you will probably be speaking to several people over a speakerphone. If at all possible, use a handheld phone that will transmit your voice as clearly as possible. If interviewers have to ask you to repeat yourself over and over again, they may begin to think that you are uncommunicative or unassertive.

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