

Interviewing Workshop Notes

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Framing remarks

our objective

help you get better at being interviewed

your objective

get a positive response

move to the next step

the steps: (1) hear about the job, (2) apply for job, (3) get the call, (4) get interviewed, (5) they make you an offer, (6) you accept, (7) when can you start

what we won't cover

how to get the interview

what to wear to the interview

how to shake hands and smile

what to do after the interview

The keys

think straight—think about what you're doing

do your homework—prepare and research

swing the bat—practice and rehearse

Think straight

what you think about makes all the difference

who gets the jobs?

not always the most qualified

often it's who knows the most about how to get hired

like acting, a dance, a game

learn how to act, to dance, how to play the game

get prepared, learn the moves, the skills

practice right

what kind of game is it?

a game of verbal and nonverbal skills, human nature, and conversation

so learn how to play the game

how to play the game

know what's going to happen (aka the rules)

know what they're looking for

have good answers

plan to practice until you get it right

keep it positive

watch for tricks, stress questions

be ready for behavioral questions

Do your homework

- prepare and research interviewing
 - anticipate questions
 - prepare answers (20-90 secs)
 - get two books: Knock 'em Dead by Martin Yate and Job Interviews for Dummies by Joyce Lain Kennedy
- prepare examples
 - have examples ready, tell stories
 - S/PAR (situation or problem, action, and result: emphasize what YOU did, show your skills)
- what your examples should show
 - made money
 - saved money
 - saved time
 - show your professional skills
- what they're looking for
 - everybody hires for the same job: problem solver
 - ability (can do the job)
 - manageable team player (wants to do the job)
- THE questions
 - tell me about yourself
 - Why YOU?
 - Why HERE?
 - What can YOU do for US?
 - Will YOU fit in with US?
 - Can WE afford YOU?
- how to handle the money question
 - don't answer too soon
 - don't let it be a reason for rejection
 - make sure you're a good fit
 - avoid a specific answer until you get a buying signal
 - let's see if we can agree on something we can both live with
- research the company
 - web site
 - newspapers, press releases
 - guerilla research

Swing the bat: role play

overview

- practice like a game, rehearse like acting
- learn and improve through role play
- you've got to say it, not just read and think about it
- this is a safe setting, nobody's on trial, no high stakes

how it works

- 2 people: roles of interviewer and job candidate
- Q&A for 2-5 mins (2-3 questions if possible)
- pull questions from hat

ask questions

- scope and responsibilities of job
- initial projects
- problems new hire will face
- use your company research

review

- how convincing
- strong points
- where needs improvement

practice conversation skills

- talk with strangers
- network for practice, gain confidence, improve your skills
- repeat key point and paraphrase
- give feedback (nod, uh-huh, I see, really, interesting, OK)
- strive for understanding first

Things to work on

the silent interview

- nonverbals: eyes, facial expression
- stay open
- mirror your interviewer

avoid tentativeness

- only, just, think, wish, feel, maybe, might
- umm, aaah, like you know

Phone tips

goals

- make a positive impression
- go to the next step
- get a face to face meeting
- suggest a meeting to explore further

have an outline, points to cover

- have answers in front of you
- have your questions ready

who am I talking to?

- match to purpose
- are we alone

to do your best

- repeat and paraphrase the questions
- answer the questions
- no one-word answers
- give examples, tell a story, use S/PAR
- keep it short

vocal tips

- keep a clear, strong voice
- match speed and delivery
- let's hear every syllable: space out words
- drop pitch at ends of sentences

Next steps

- make your own system
 - prepare cards with questions
 - develop your examples
 - write down notes to guide your answers
- do your own role play with a friend or associate
 - practice answers, rehearse, make it natural, spontaneous
- have a buddy call
 - get comfortable with the phone

Resources

- Knock 'em Dead (book) by Martin Yate
- Job Interviews for Dummies (book) by Joyce Lain Kennedy
- Effective Interviews (book) by Jenny Rogers
- Interview For Success: A Practical Guide to Increasing Job Interviews, Offers, and Salaries by Ron Krannich
- Power Interviews: Job-Winning Tactics from Fortune 500 Recruiters (book) by Neal M. Yeager and Lee Hough
- What Color is Your Parachute (book) by Richard Nelson Bolles
- Monster.com web site at the interview center: <http://interview.monster.com/>

Interview questions

Tell me about yourself.

Why do you want to work here?

What can you do for us that someone else can't?

What decisions are most difficult for you?

How much money do you want?

Don't you think you're overqualified for this job?

Explain how your experience relates to the job we're trying to fill.

Describe a situation where you had to work under pressure.

What did you like about your last job?

What did you dislike about your last job?

What would you like to be doing five years from now?

Why did you leave your last job?

Describe a difficult problem you had to deal with in one of your previous jobs.

Have you ever been fired or laid off? [wait for an answer] If so, why?

Why should I hire an outsider when I could fill the job with someone inside the company?

Why were you out of work for so long?

Describe a situation where your work or an idea was criticized.

Your application shows you have been with one company a long time without any appreciable increase in rank or salary. Tell me about this.

Why should we hire you?

What do you look for in a job?

What skills and qualifications are essential for success in the position of technical writer?

How long would it take for you to make a meaningful contribution?

How does this assignment fit into your overall career plan?

What do you believe is the most difficult part of being a technical writer?

How would your colleagues describe you?

How would your boss describe you?

How would you describe yourself?

What do you think of your present or past boss?

What were the two or three most significant accomplishments in your last assignment?

What were the two or three most significant accomplishments in your career so far?

Can you work well under deadlines or pressure?

How much do you expect if we offer you this position?

Why do you want to work for us?

Have you kept up in your field with additional training?

What are your career goals?

What are your strong points?

What are your weak points?

What was wrong with your current or last position?

Describe the typical process you go to develop a new document.

What procedure do you recommend to make document revisions go smoother?

How important do you think it is to have exactly the type of experience we're looking for?

Tell me about your background, accomplishments.

How would you describe your most recent job performance.

How do you stay professionally current?

What outside activities are most significant to your personal development?

Top questions and good answers

Tell me about yourself.

Keep your answer to one or two minutes; don't ramble. Use your resume summary as a base to start.

What do you know about our company?

Do your homework before the interview! Spend some time online or at the library researching the company. Find out as much as you can, including products, size, income, reputation, image, management talent, people, skills, history, and philosophy. Project an informed interest; let the interviewer tell *you* about the company.

Why do you want to work for us?

Don't talk about what you want; first, talk about their needs: You would like to be part of a specific company project; you would like to solve a company problem; you can make a definite contribution to specific company goals.

What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

Relate experiences that show you've had success in solving previous employer problem(s) that may be similar to those of the prospective employer.

What about the job offered do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?

List three or more attractive factors and only one minor unattractive factor.

Why should we hire you?

Because of your knowledge, experience, abilities, and skills.

What do you look for in a job?

An opportunity to use your skills, to perform and be recognized.

Please give me your definition of a technical writer.

Keep it brief. Give an action- and results-oriented definition.

How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

Not long at all. You expect only a brief period of adjustment to the learning curve.

How long would you stay with us?

As long as we both feel I'm contributing, achieving, growing, etc.

You may be overqualified for the position we have to offer.

Strong companies need strong people. A growing, energetic company is rarely unable to use its employees' talents. Emphasize your interest in a long-term association, pointing out that the employer will get a faster return on investment because you have more experience than required.

What important trends do you see in our industry?

Keep your answer to two or three trends.

How have you helped increase sales? Profits?

Explain in some detail, citing figures and specific examples.

Have you helped reduce costs? How?

Describe in some detail with specifics.

In your current or last position, what features did you like the most? Least?

Be honest but put a positive spin on your least favorite duties.

In your current or last position, what are or were your five most significant accomplishments?

Refer to the key accomplishments already identified on your resume.

Why haven't you found a new position before now?

Finding a job is easy; finding the right job is more difficult. Stress that you are being selective, and are looking for the right "fit."

Had you thought of leaving your present position before? What do you think held you there?

Explain that your job is no longer challenging and that you feel your talents are best used elsewhere.

What do you think of your boss?

Be as positive as you can, even if you don't really believe it.

Would you describe a situation in which your work was criticized?

Be as positive as you can and emphasize what you learned from the situation.

What other types of jobs or companies are you considering?

Keep your answer related to this company's field, and don't give out specific company names.

If I spoke with your previous boss, what would he say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Emphasize your skills, and don't be overly negative about your weaknesses. It's always safer to identify a lack of a skill as an area for improvement rather than a shortcoming.

Can you work under pressures, deadlines, etc.? Yes, it's a way of life in business. Be sure to cite examples of your success.

How have you changed the nature of your job?

Explain how you have improved the efficiency, productivity, and the like.

In your present position, what problems have you identified that had previously been overlooked?

Keep it brief and don't brag.

Do you feel you might be better off in a different size company? Different type company?

It depends on the job. Elaborate slightly.

How do you resolve conflict on a project team?

Explain that communication is important, and that you would first discuss the issues privately.

What was the most difficult decision you ever had to make?

Try to relate your response to the prospective employment situation.

Why did you leave your previous job?

Refine your answer based on your comfort level and honesty. Give a “group” answer if possible, such as our department was consolidated or eliminated.

Describe what you feel to be an ideal working environment.

One in which people are treated as fairly as possible.

How would you evaluate your present firm?

It’s an excellent company that afforded me many fine experiences.

How much are you looking for?

Answer with a question, such as “What is the salary range for similar jobs in your company?” If the interviewer doesn’t answer, then give a range of what you understand you are worth in the marketplace. Check out Monster.com’s Salary Center.

How much do you expect, if we offer this position to you?

Be careful; the market value of the job may be the key answer, such as “My understanding is that a job like the one you’re describing may be in the range of \$_____.”

What kind of salary are you worth?

Have a specific figure in mind...don’t be hesitant.

What is the toughest part of a job for you?

Be honest. Remember, not everyone can do everything.

How would you describe your own personality?

Balanced is a good word to use, but remember the type of company you are interviewing at. Some companies may want someone who is aggressive and a go-getter.

Are you a leader?

Absolutely! Cite specific examples using your current job as a reference point.

What are your future goals? Avoid, “I would like the job you advertised.” Instead, give long-range goals.

What are your strengths?

Present at least three and relate them to the company and job you are interviewing for.

What are your weaknesses?

Don't say that you don't have any. Try not to cite personal characteristics as weaknesses, but be ready to have one if the interviewer presses. Turn a negative into a positive answer: "I am sometimes intent on completing an assignment and get too deeply involved when we are late."

If you could start your career again, what would you do differently?

Nothing... I am happy today, so I don't want to change my past.

What career options do you have at the moment?

"I see three areas of interest..." Relate those to the position and industry.

How would you describe the essence of success? According to your definition of success, how successful have you been so far?

Think carefully about your answer and relate it to your career accomplishments.

Questions you might ask

Why is this position open?

How often has it been filled in the past five years? What were the main reasons?

What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?

What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?

What is most pressing? What would you like to have done in the next 3 months.

What are some of the long term objectives you would like to see completed?

What are some of the more difficult problems one would have to face in this position? How do you think these could best be handled?

What type of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances, etc?

What freedom would I have in determining my own work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?

What advancement opportunities are available for the person who is successful in this position, and within what time frame?

In what ways has this organization been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?

What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?

How is one evaluated in this position?

What accounts for success within the company?

What would I be expected to accomplish in this position?

What are the greatest challenges in this position?

How do you think I fit the position?

Behavioral style questions

More and more companies are using a “behavioral” style of interview, in which the applicant is asked about his or her past performance in various situations. The idea is that the past is a good predictor of the future. Here, courtesy of Suzanne Macheck, are some behavioral interview questions asked by a company she knows of. Practice before the interview is the best way to prepare yourself to handle them:

Describe a situation in which you forecasted a problem and prepared a strategy for handling it.

Please describe a situation where you had to compile a large amount of information in order to complete a task or a project.

Tell me about a situation in which you supervised someone whose performance was substandard.

Describe a situation where you helped motivate someone to improve his or her performance.

Tell me about a time when your innovative approach convinced someone to try something new.

Did you ever develop a creative solution to a problem? Tell me about it.

Please describe a situation in which you were responsible for organizing the training of other people, in addition to being responsible for your own daily tasks.

Tell me about a time when you prepared for and led an important meeting.

Describe a situation where you helped someone establish his or her objectives.

Were you ever responsible for the outcome of someone else’s efforts? Please tell me about it.

Please describe a time when you were successful at an activity only after repeated attempts.

Describe a situation in which you persevered with an idea or a plan even when others disagreed with you.

More interviewing tips

No matter how many thousands of questions an interviewer could theoretically ask you, they all boil down to just five:

Why YOU? What distinguishes you from 19 other people who can do this same job?

Do your homework.

Why HERE? Why are you here? What is it about this place that attracted you?

What can YOU do for US? What do you have to contribute to what we do?

Will YOU fit in with US? Will you get along with, or irritate, all my other employees?

Can WE afford YOU? Never do salary negotiation until – in the second, or third interview – they have definitely said they want you. Always let the employer name a figure first.

Key point: Being able to do the job well will not necessarily get you hired. The person who gets hired is often the one who knows the most about how to get hired.

book resource: “45 Effective Ways for Hiring Smart” by Dr. Pierre Mornell. (Ten Speed Press, 1998). A wonderful wise book that looks at interviewing from the employer’s perspective – which is what every job-hunter should do. Relatively few pages, large print, easy to read.

articles on interviewing from TECHWR-L:

<http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/employmentarticles/jobinterviewhomepage.html>

More interviewing resources

salary negotiation tips

<http://www.jist.com/vig6172.htm>

phone calling tips

<http://www.jist.com/vig7241.htm>

quick tips for college kids

<http://career.asu.edu/S/CEC/QuickTips/QTInterviewingDetails.htm>

interviewing tips, questions you may be asked, questions for you to ask

<http://www.careercc.com/interv3.shtml>

mock job interviews

<http://www.job-interview.net/sample/Demosamp.htm>

don't use limiting words such as only, just, I wish, I think, I feel

getting the interviewer to fall in love with you; preparing, questions, etc.

<http://www.joblink-usa.com/interview.htm>

monster virtual interview

<http://content.monster.com/jobinfo/interview/>

adapted excerpts:

Prepare a short information statement. Be ready to answer the dreaded question, "Tell me about yourself and your background." Your statement should include some information on the type of companies and the industries you have worked for, your strengths, your transferable skills, and some of your personal traits. Practice saying this statement until it is natural.

Be prepared to talk about your successes and experiences. The employer will want to find out about your experience – successes and failures, your work ethic, your track record. Make sure you have an answer to the questions you expect to be asked.

interview cheat sheet

<http://interview.monster.com/rehearsal/cheat/>

tips from monster members

<http://interview.monster.com/rehearsal/boost/>

mastering the phone interview

<http://interview.monster.com/stage/phone/>

From Knock 'Em Dead

by Martin Yate

The interviewer studies his notepad for a few seconds as you sit down. The feeling hits you, suddenly, you're on trial. Will you have the right answers when the interviewer asks:

- Why do you want to work here?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?
- What decisions are most difficult for you?
- How much money do you want?

In *Knock 'Em Dead*, bestselling author Martin Yate gives you the best answers to these and scores of other difficult questions – along with proven advice on every aspect of today's job search.

How to Knock 'Em Dead at the Interview

These are an example of some of the 200 most common interview questions that are discussed in depth in *Knock 'Em Dead*. Learn how to give winning responses to several profile questions, stress questions, and entry-level questions. To excel at a job interview you need to have carefully prepared in advance not just “good” answers to the interview questions – but answers that make you really stand out from the other candidates in a positive way.

What Kind of Person Are You Really, Mr. Jones?

Learn the techniques an interviewer uses to find out whether you will fit into the company and the department, and most important, whether you are a good person to work with.

- Can you work under pressure?
- What did you like/dislike about your last job?
- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- Why did you leave your job?
- Describe a difficult problem you have to deal with.
- Have you ever been fired? If so, why?

The Stress Interview

Your worst nightmare can come true at a stress interview, but once you learn that these questions are just amplified versions of much simpler ones, you'll remain cool and calm.

- Would you like to have your boss's job?
- See this pen I'm holding? Sell it to me.
- Why should I hire an outsider when I could fill the job with someone inside the company?
- Why were you out of work for so long?
- Describe a situation where your work or an idea was criticized.
- Your application shows you have been with one company a long time without any appreciable increase in rank or salary. Tell me about this.

Welcome to the Real World

For the most recent graduate, here are some tough questions specifically tailored to discover your business potential.

- I'd be interested to hear about some things you learned in school that could be used on the job.
- We have tried to hire people from your school/your major before, and they never seem to work out. What makes you different?
- Have you ever had difficulties getting along with others?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?