

Preparing for Job Interviews

CHRIS MILLER: Our topic tonight is preparing for job interviews. See if I can bring my-- bring myself up here. I don't have my view. There I am. Other way. I had it working earlier, but not right now, looks like.

Well, I'm Chris Miller. I'm your Global Campus career counselor, career advisor. And I am speaking about job interviews tonight. Again, thank you for joining the webinar. If you have any technical questions, go ahead and utilize the chat box.

And we have both Andrea and Andrea in the Global Campus here, Global Connections and Global Campus to help with any technical problems you have. Any content questions you have, you can also put those in the chat box. And I will get to those at the end of the webinar.

And let's go ahead and get started. This usually takes-- I don't know. I feel like I always undersell the time, and then I go over. So I don't know, about 40 minutes, give or take, and then I'll have time for questions. Thanks again for joining.

If you've been to any of my webinars, you know I usually start with a brief little look at the career development process, this little snapshot here. I think it's a pretty decent snapshot of it. And I like that it's circular because I've found that the career development process for most people is kind of a cycle that happens several different times throughout their life.

So I like the circle here. And some career development theorists have pointed out that there's kind of a cycle of growth and decay, where we really interested in one area, and pursue that for a while, grow in that field, potentially. And then most of us switch out, pivot, and have this also, this time of decay. But this is a pretty good look at it, I think.

And tonight, since we're talking about interviewing, most of it is this Take Action section, supposing that we've already explored our options, and we've already become focused and applied to a job, and we're taking action and interviewing now. Know Yourself is an important section for this obviously also, for if you're going to be a strong interviewer, you're going to have to know yourself well and be able to communicate your interests, your strengths, and your values too.

So different types of interviews-- one that's kind of analogous to regular job interviews is the informational interview, which I just briefly talk about, as a networking activity where you are arranging conversations with people who have knowledge and experience in the profession that you're researching, that you're investigating. It's used by experienced professionals to research advancement opportunities in the careers as well as workers seeking first careers or career changes. And I think that fits most of the people that I work with.

Some of the reasons would be, to do this, would be to gain insight, information from personal accounts of the work setting, knowledge and skill requirements, and current trends in the field; to develop your own networking skills and introduce yourself to people in the profession; help you identify how to prepare yourself and work toward a particular career goal; increase motivation in working towards goals; and build confidence and experience in interacting with professionals. So just as a brief mention of that type of an interview, which is not a job interview, but can lead to that.

Mock interviews are just simply practice interviews that you can do. If you're a Global Campus student, I am here to offer my services and offer mock interviews. So if you're interested in that, you can send me an email. My contact information will be at the end of the webinar. But just to reference it, it's also CMiller66@wsu.edu. So if you're interested in a practice interview with me, that is an option for Global Campus students.

But in terms of other types of job interviews, phone interviewing is common in today's competitive job market. The method of interviewing has advantages and disadvantages for both the job seeker and the employer. Employers obviously like it because it's cost effective.

So here are some tips if you do have a phone interview ever. Expect to be asked when, why, and how questions regarding both your employment and educational history. Wait for the interviewer. Wait until the interviewer has had a chance to kind of set the agenda in the beginning before you take control of the conversation. Typically, they have information they want to impart, especially at the beginning.

Have a brief about 45-second intro, kind of like an elevator pitch that's ready to go. And you should include your background, your experience, and skills that validate your fit for the job. Make sure the information you tell an interviewer does not conflict with anything on your resume.

If asked about your background, be upfront. Do not express any discomfort at the questions. Often, that would be a red flag to an employer.

And be sure to get the interviewer's name and their contact information so you can send a thank-you letter after the interview, which is something that'll-- a tip that'll come up a few times. And an interesting point about that is it used to always be that a handwritten thank-you note afterward was always the best policy. And in most cases, it still is. But if you're interviewing at a company that has really-- really highly values sustainability, then you would want to consider not wasting paper, and instead, using an email for a thank you.

So obviously, remember that the interviewer will not be able to see you. So body language can't be used to make a positive impression. With that being the case, what you say and how you say it become much more important. So you should strive to present a strong, confident image of yourself.

Talk about your experience and what you have learned from it. Remember to use crisp and clear language. This will keep the interviewer's attention as you continue the conversation. At the conclusion of the interview, propose a face-to-face meeting at their convenience in the near future. If they say that they don't feel like you'd be a good match, don't be afraid to show surprise and recount your related skills and background and offer to answer any further questions. And, of course, remember again to send a thank you, as you would do with really any of these methods of interviewing.

For video interviews, a number of companies are utilizing Skype or something like Zoom, like this, to interview candidates for a number of reasons. Obviously, if it's distance, and it's difficult to interview them face-to-face for the first time.

So some of the tips here-- remember to check your username and ensure it's professional and appropriate. Ensure you have a solid internet connection. So be sure to plug in to the internet port instead of relying on Wi-Fi if that's a possibility, of course.

Secure your surroundings so you're free from distractions and your interviewers won't get distracted by background noise and activity. So always be aware of the background. Pay attention to your attire, of course, and the backdrop behind you.

Skype and video interviews allow the employer to see you and your surroundings, obviously. Place the camera and microphone that you're using on a steady service so it's not bouncing and moving during the interview. And also, make note to speak-- not to speak, but to make eye contact with the camera, with the lens instead of the screen, as much as possible.

For panel interviews, this is very common for a first interview in many organizations, where the candidate is interviewed by multiple members of the hiring committee. They allow companies to gain multiple perspectives on a candidate and help ensure the candidate is a good fit for the team or the program. When interviewing with this sort of setting, it's important to remember to speak to the group and try to form a connection with all the people who are there. So especially, if someone asks you a question, you're going to focus most of your attention on the person that asked you.

But also, be sure to work the room as you speak. Place the camera and microphone-- I'm sorry. For group interviews, of course, group interviews are interviews where there are multiple applicants interviewing with one or more interviewers at the same time. These are often used to observe group behaviors and to get a sense of how candidates interact with one another and with people in general, so in a team setting.

It's important to have a solid sense of who you are and how you react in a group setting. So if you're someone who is typically pretty outgoing and takes the lead, remember to pause at times to ensure that others are able to participate and share their perspectives. And the opposite goes for those who are typically more reserved. So ensure you speak up from time to time so your voice and perspectives are heard as well.

So interviewing obviously is something that comes naturally to some people and is a challenge for others. So it's important to remember that no interview is ever a failure. And throughout your career, it's likely you will not get most of the jobs for which you interview.

For any given job, there might be several hundred applicants, and only a few of those might be called in for the interview. So just by getting that interview, you are improving your chances for future jobs. More importantly, you get experience interviewing whenever you do it. So the more you do it, the better you'll get at it, just like anything else.

Preparation is the perfect substitute for practice, practice, practice, of course; learning the most you can about the job and its requirements in the company and the industry; paying particular attention to the organization that you are trying to work for; all these things will help you prepare. And the interviewer will know this. It'll show initiative, and it leads to more insightful conversation during the interview and distinguishes you from other candidates.

From your perspective, thorough preparation lets you learn even more about the position and the organization. And this knowledge enables you to make a more informed decision should you receive a job offer. And just as importantly, preparation builds confidence, which lets you, or at least it helps you relax during the interview. And that translates into success. Your confidence will show, and you'll give a better presentation of your qualifications.

And if the presentation isn't good enough on the first interview, it's still knowledge gained for the next interview. So your familiarity with certain questions and situations will make your responses more polished the next time. So any interview, even if it does not lead to a job, is preparation for your next interview. And that could be the one that you're actually-- that you actually want.

So some of the types of questions that you'll get in an interview-- and I'm taking a lot of this from this WC Resume Packet, which I can also send you if you're interested. But just general opening questions, like the one you'll get most of the time in most instances is when they just say, tell me about yourself. But sometimes you'll get that wacky interviewer who really wants to throw you a curveball at the beginning. And they'll ask you something like, if you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently, and why, something that really tries to rattle you and throw you off your game just to see how you react kind of with an off-topic question.

But also, work experience, work-related questions, like, describe your ideal work environment. What did you enjoy most or at least on your last job? Describe the most difficult work-related situation you've ever faced, and how did you react? What relationships should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to them? Why did you leave your last job? And would they give you a good recommendation? Are you willing to spend a certain amount of time as a trainee?

There are also education-related questions, like, what was your most rewarding college experience? What did you choose-- why did you choose your college or university? Why did you select your field of study? Which courses did you like the most or least, and why?

Do you think your grades are a good indicator of college achievement? And that's always interesting for a quote, unquote "nontraditional student" who has different experiences with different institutions and likely a large time gap in between starting and finishing. If you had the chance to repeat your college career over, what would you do differently, and why?

In terms of activities, how do you like to spend your time outside of work? And what opportunities did you have for leadership? What goals have you set for yourself outside of work?

And in terms of goals, where do you hope to be in your career in one year, five years or so, so on? What are your short and long-term career goals? When and why did you establish these goals? And what do you hope to accomplish in your lifetime?

In terms of personal qualities, how would you describe yourself? How would a close friend, professor, employer describe you? Give three words that describe you best. What do you think would be your greatest contribution to our organization? Do you enjoy working alone or with other people? What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction, and why?

Also, questions about success or failures, the common, what are your-- what are some of your weaknesses or strengths, or great successes or failures, and why? What would you do differently to change the failures into success? And that's always the right strategy whenever you encounter that question, which I would say doesn't happen as frequently anymore. But whenever an employer asks about a weakness in an interview, it's always helpful to make sure it's not directly relevant to the job, and also provide information about what you're doing to better that or to correct that, whatever it may be.

Questions about knowledge of the organization-- why did you seek a job with the organization? What do you know about it or the industry? Why should we hire you? If you were hiring a person for this position, what qualities would you look for? That's a fun question.

And then technical, any technical question that you could get related to whatever specific industry it is. You might be asked to solve a specific problem. Or you might be given a situation and asked how you would respond in that situation.

So during the interview, of course anxiety is normal for all parties involved. It's almost always awkward for everyone. So don't worry about being nervous, as much as you can. I know it's easier said than done. It's normal, and it will be expected. Just remember, the interviewer wants to hire you if you have the right qualifications and interest in the position.

Many interviewers will begin the interview with some small talk to help you relax. This may seem irrelevant to the position, but you're still being evaluated. That's important to keep in mind.

You're being evaluated from the moment you walk in, so with everyone that you interact with for any in-person interview. Take the opening moments to show great attitude and positivity. And hopefully, you will get a sense of the energy level and the pacing.

Second phase of the interview consists of the interviewer asking you questions and trying to determine your match to the specifications needed to do the work well, and also, specifications to the posting. The most reliable way for an interviewer to project how would you perform in the future is to examine the past. And this is a common theme that'll come up again.

Therefore, many employers prepare behavioral-based questions, such as, tell me about a time when you had to go beyond what is ordinarily expected of an employee in order to get the job done. Or, give me an example of an important goal you set, and describe your success in reaching it. Describe a time when you had-- you worked with a disgruntled customer, perhaps.

So by analyzing the questions asked of you, you will be able to find out more of the particulars about the job for which you've applied. What emphasis does the interviewer seem to be placing on which skills, the knowledge of personality traits and attitudes? That insight can help you focus your answers more easily to the employer's position.

Always relate your answers to future responsibilities and the organization's policies. Give concrete examples from your past achievements that illustrate your qualifications. Never answer with a simple yes or no unless it's one of those, have you read the job posting, and do you fully understand it, some of those little ones.

But your points should be clear to enable the employer to understand what you're trying to say, relevant to enable the employer to determine your strengths the particular job, and adequate to enable the employer to have sufficient information to make good decision. So with these behavioral questions, the STAR method is a good technique to tackle any of those. And sometimes it's listed as CAR. Sometimes it's listed as STAR. And I will explain the slight difference between those two.

So these are, again, based on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior or performance. And so this can come from work experience, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, family life, whatever. It's important to focus on your experience, behavior, skills, and abilities that are related to the job, so anything that you can pull out that is transferable to that job.

So this STAR technique, so you answer a behavior-based question explaining the S STAR in STAR Situation, so Situation for S; the Task, T, for which you were responsible; the specific Action, A, you took; and the Result of your actions, R. So that's complete STAR. Sometimes you see it as

CAR, which is Context, Action, Result. And that just kind of combines the S and the T, which is helpful for some, because some people kind of blend S and T, Situation and Task.

The best way to think of it is really Context in terms of macro and micro. So the S is the bigger picture, the larger context. You're really setting the stage for this story that explains your behavior, whereas Task is the specific micro action which you were responsible for, that specific Task, the problem, so specifically in a smaller level. So that's kind of the same thing kind of spelled out in different ways.

In terms of an example, describe a recent work-related problem and the actions you took to solve it. One from a former-- I think former resume packet I had-- talked about the WSU school newspaper. So Situation here to answer that is that advertising revenue was falling off for the Evergreen, which is the WSU school newspaper, and a large number of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts. So that's the Situation.

T for Task-- my goal was to increase advertising revenue. A for Action-- so the Action was I designed a new promotional packet to go with a rate sheet and compared the benefits of the Evergreen circulation with other ad media in the area; also set up special training sessions for the account execs with a professor who discussed competitive selling strategies. And the Result was that they signed 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements, increasing new advertisers by 20% over the same period last year.

So whenever you can also have any kind of specific data to back up your STAR, or really anything you're really mentioning in an interview, it's helpful. I know that's not always the case, but it's something-- it's helpful for me to point out.

In preparing for them, you want to analyze-- preparing for these behavioral questions, you want to analyze the type of position you're applying, for which you're applying. And what skills, so really focusing on skills, do the employers require? Analyzing your own background, what skills do you have that relate to the job objective? Identify examples from your past experience when you demonstrate those skills.

Concentrate on developing complete STAR answers. Where possible, quantify your results. Be prepared to provide examples of when results also didn't turn out as you planned, and what did you do? And then before entering the room, identify two to three of your top selling points, and determine how you'll convey those points in a behavioral-based question.

In terms of-- oh, I should give you some ideas of some other behavioral questions. What was the toughest decision you had to make at a previous job? Tell me about the most difficult person you've had to communicate with. Tell me about a group project you were involved in, and what was your role?

Tell me about a time where you had to overcome disappointment. Tell me about a time when you had to resolve conflict in a group situation. And can you describe a time when you disagreed with a co-worker or supervisor, and how did you handle it?

It's important to remember that-- not to view any experience as insignificant. So it's not always just recounting work experience. So it's likely that hearing about one of those, what one might think seemingly insignificant or minor experiences, as long as you're fulfilling that STAR, it will satisfy an interviewer more than recounting of just a top achievement.

During the stress of an interview, it's really difficult to recall a good example. So it's definitely important to practice and prepare for those ahead of time. Rehearse how you describe key experiences to interviewers so you can recount them vividly and concisely.

If you can create strong visual images in their minds, you'll have a better chance of convincing them that you have the desired skills. So it's really storytelling as a skill is what that is. And when you relate a story to interviewers, describe features of your personality that helped you succeed, and what exactly you accomplished, and how your work helped you or helped the employer.

So in terms of questions you should ask, at the end of the interview, you almost always have that opportunity. They'll say, what questions do you have for us? So it's important to know what questions to ask, but also, know what questions not to ask.

So avoid asking any questions that are answered on the company's website. They will recognize when you haven't done your homework. So if it isn't-- but if some information isn't clear to you, by all means, do ask for clarification.

Don't bring up salary or benefits in the initial interview. The employer may choose to bring up that information, but you should not initiate the topic. Avoid asking any personal questions or questions that will put the employer on the defensive, anything like their educational background, marital status, past work experiences, and so on.

Don't ask questions that have already been answered during the interview. So if you do have a prepared list, make sure you're not just rehashing something that's already-- that you've already gone over, or they have. So don't repeat them unless you need some kind of clarification.

So questions you could ask-- information about the organization. So like, what makes the organization different from others? Where does the organization plan to be in 5 or 10 years? Something about the position or the infrastructure-- so how does the position relate to others in the department? And which departments would I interact with most?

Advancement opportunities-- so how is the position for which I am applying evaluated, and how often? Questions about job security-- like, how did the opening for which I am applying

occur? Questions about professional development also-- is training provided for the position for which I am interviewing, and how is it provided, and for how long? And does the organization support membership and participation in professional associations or organizations?

So some just general tips for successful interviews, and some of this will be a little bit repetitive from things I've talked about, but studying the company. Learn as much as you can about the company beforehand. Know its products or services and its profit margin, its management, its culture, its dress code, anything else you can think of, as you can. You can't access all that information all the time. But you can gather a lot of information from career researching and for networking or informational interviews, as I mentioned in the beginning.

So do practice interviews. Read through sample interview questions. Check out videos online, questions online. Maybe you can find something that are really relevant to whichever company or industry you're pursuing. Think about how your experience and work in classes and activities can relate to the job that you're seeking.

Allow plenty of time to get there. And if possible, visit the site in advance and make note of how much time it takes to get there. Plan your interview attire in advance to make sure your clothes and shoes are clean, and pay attention to personal hygiene. Avoid cologne and perfume.

And turn your phone off. That's always a good one. Bring extra copies of your resume and a list of references. Speak clearly. Don't be afraid to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts. Be honest. Don't try to cover up mistakes. Instead, focus on how you learn from them.

Be assertive. Remember that the interview is a way for you to learn if the job is right for you also. Have several questions prepared ahead of time. And ask the interviewer for a business card, and send thank-you notes as soon as possible afterward. Like I said before, handwritten is usually the best, but not always.

Just a few more tips highlighted in Richard Bolles's *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, a pretty iconic career development text that's updated every year, but he mentions the 50/50 rule where some studies have revealed that in general, people who get hired are those who make speaking and listening 50-50 in the interview. So the 50/50 rule, especially when it comes to behavioral questions, especially in that kind of small talk phase in the very beginning before it starts, just make sure you're both-- you're asking them questions, and they ask you. You're kind of reciprocating. That's the idea there.

Number seven-- oh, I'm sorry, the 20-second a two-minute rule-- so another study reveal that when it's your turn to speak or answer questions, you should plan not to speak any longer than 2 minutes at a time if you want to make the best impression and that, in fact, a good answer can often take only 20 seconds. And that's one of those things. It depends on the question that's asked. With a behavioral one, it's definitely going to be closer to two minutes. But some questions are easily answered in a shorter amount of time.

Risk versus reward-- it's important to remember that the employer is primarily concerned about risk, that if a given person is hired, they won't be able to do the job; they'll lack necessary skills or experience; that they won't put in a full working day; they'll take frequent sick days; they'll only stick around for a couple of months before they find a different job; that they won't be able to master the job in a quick enough time frame; they won't get along with other co-workers; they only do the minimum; they have to be told what to do rather than display the initiative. So these are some of the risks that the employers are concerned about.

Also, focusing on the small things. So again, this is the microcosm revealing macrocosm, that he, in Richard Bolle's words, but like I said before, previous experiences and performances will predict future performances. So again, things like your personal appearance and habits, so like we said in some of the other tips, just being clean and personal hygiene, not wearing cologne or aftershave or perfume.

Nervous mannerisms, so you-- if one continually avoids eye contact; don't have a firm handshake; they have poor posture; they fidget with their hands. Lacking self-confidence, so speaking too softly or answering things in extremely hesitant fashion; only one-word answers; or if you're constantly interrupting.

And also, the consideration you show to other people, so a lack of courtesy to receptionists, assistants, a server, if it's like a lunch meeting. If you display any extreme criticalness towards previous employers, and if you forget to thank them then and also later with a thank you note. And it's just values of a sort that one would display arrogance or aggressiveness or any sign of laziness or complaining or dishonesty, a sign of irresponsibility, not following instructions, any sign of instability. So things like that are the small things that Richard Bolles identifies.

Also knowing what skills are important to all employers, pretty much in every industry, the non-technical ones; so they're looking for employees who are punctual, who will arrive on time, who are dependable; who have a good attitude; who have drive, energy, and enthusiasm; who want more than a paycheck; who are well organized, can handle themselves and people well; use language effectively. They can work on a computer, committed to teamwork. They're flexible, who are trainable, who are goal-oriented, who are creative, have integrity and organizational loyalty.

And then lastly, if you can show any evidence of your work, that's helpful. And it's easier for some industries compared to others. So if you are an artist or a craftsperson or anyone who produces a product, you can bring a sample of that in some kind of portfolio form or flash drive or online.

I'm a big fan of LinkedIn for this for most people because, for example, for me, I would have videos like this, this recording of a webinar directly in my LinkedIn profile. That shows evidence, an artifact of something that I do as part of my job that I can bring to a different organization. Those are just some of the other tips that Richard Bolles has identified.

And you know what? I think that brings me to the end, which I am impressed with my timing on there. I usually run long.

So again, here's my contact information. The easiest way to connect with me is through email. It's CMiller66@wsu.edu. And there's my phone number, the general Career Support website for Global Campus students, and also for prospective students if they are investigating whether or not the Global Campus is a good fit for them. I work with prospective students on their career development questions to see if we can help them. And then also, the WSU Career Guide Blog, which is just part of the general go Global Campus blog, and I post under the Careers category.

Again, thank you so much for joining. And I will stick around for some questions for a while. So it'll take me a minute to kind of scan back to look at any questions that might have popped up.

Any suggestions for keeping your answers concise, resources to use, methods to practice? Well, I think I probably answer that with the 20-second to 2-minute rule. It's just kind of running through. It's a practice, practice, practice answer, really, just running through these different questions.

I can send you the WSU Resume Packet. It has some of the questions that I-- and some of the sample questions that I brought up. There are a lot more in there. But just practicing sticking to that about just shy of 2-minute response and just kind of timing it as you go.

Again, mock interviews and practicing are another good way to help with that. I do help students with the resumes also. Pretty much any career development issue you have as a Global Campus student, I'm here for.

Yeah, I can repeat STAR again. It's Situation, Task, Action, and Result. So Situation is kind of the larger context of setting the stage when you're answering a behavioral question. Task is kind of thought of as, what is the problem within that context? What is the main problem, the main issue? And then Action is what you specifically did to address it. And then Result is, what was the outcome?

So again, good questions to ask at the end of an interview-- information about the organization, position and infrastructure, advancement opportunities, job security, professional development, things like that. And the WSU Resume Packet has some more examples other than the ones that I brought up.

Let me do just a quick search. I don't know if it'll be helpful for you, but I can put the link for the information packet in here. For ASCC.wsu.edu, this is the Academic Success and Career Center website for the Pullman campus. And there's a lot of good information here that all WSU students can access.

Under Career Services here on the dropdown menu, I'm going to click on that. And they have changed it recently, so I'm going to go to Overview. And on the right-hand side, some of these

tabs, the bottom one is going to be Information Packets. And then there's a Resume Packet. There's a Job and Internship Search Packet. There's an Interviewing Packet and Grad School Packet too.

So here's the newest version, I believe, of the Interviewing Packet right here. And that's how you find it. So again, just in terms of finding it, ASCC.wsu.edu. I guess that's actually a better one for me to post in there, because then you can get access to the other packets, info packets too. So ASCC.wsu.edu, under Career Services, under Overview, under Information Packets.

Again, I'll stick around for a few more minutes. I just want to thank you again for attending. Let me know if you have any questions.