

**Office of Career Services
Southeastern Louisiana University**



**Job
Interviewing
Guidelines**

Market yourself in the job search by presenting yourself professionally throughout the interview process.

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CAREER COUNSELORS are available in the Office of Career Services (CS) to assist juniors, seniors, graduate students, and alumni with preparing for the most critical step in the job search – the interview! Now that you've developed a professional quality resume, learn how to further present your knowledge and skills appropriately and with impact during the job interview.

REMEMBER! HOW you apply for a job is as important as the qualifications you have to offer. In fact, you should view your **JOB SEARCH SKILLS** as part of your overall qualifications. Employers evaluate not only the skills you possess **FOR THE JOB**, but also the skills you exhibit in **LOOKING FOR THE JOB**, evidenced in the quality of your resume and cover letter, and your ability to conduct yourself professionally throughout the interview process.

Following are guidelines to assist you in preparing for, and conducting, a successful job interview process:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. ***Research company/organization through:***
 - Company/organization web site, online directories (see CS web site), business directories in university library, industry/trade journals, networking with current or former employees of company/organization and other personal contacts;
 - Calling company/organization for info if cannot locate web site or other source of information
2. ***Research position/type of work on:***
 - Company/organization web site
 - SIGI 3, OOH, O*Net resources on CS web site (see "Career Information," next page)
3. ***Access Interview Assistance section of the CS web site***, under the Career Counseling drop-down menu, and view other interviewing information and tips!
4. ***See a CS Career Counselor for a "mock interview"*** – prepare for your "mock interview" by writing, and bringing with you, your answers to the **Sample Interview Questions** provided in this booklet.
5. ***Understand the concept of "Behavioral Interviewing"*** – be able to "tell a story" of how you applied and/or developed specific skills to address and improve upon a challenging or problem situation – see section on **Behavioral Interviewing** in this booklet.
6. ***Read "Knock 'Em Dead 2007: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Guide"*** by Martin Yate, which contains over 200 interview questions and answers and the latest job search tips; or other job interview books such as **"The Complete Q & A Job Interview Book"** by Jeffrey G. Allen. A useful **web site with interview questions tailored to various career fields** is: <http://interview.monster.com>.
7. ***Plan interview wardrobe*** - see "Dress for Success" guidelines in this booklet !
8. ***Make extra copies of resume, cover letter and references page*** – to bring, along with a writing pad and pen in a portfolio or case, to the interview. ***Be prepared to discuss every item on your resume – market your qualifications for the job!***

INFORMATION TO GATHER ON EMPLOYER BEFORE INTERVIEW

- Products or services; key competitors; principal locations and subsidiaries/branches, etc.
 - Sales and profit trends; potential new markets; future initiatives
- Whether publicly or privately owned; recent items in the news; current stock market info
 - Types/numbers of customers/clients; your experiences with products or services
 - Organization structure – by services, product lines, functions, etc.
 - Methods of training, evaluation, and promotion
 - Names and job titles of key contacts - name of recruiter/interviewer

CAREER ASSESSMENT

Talk to your career counselor about career assessment – interest and personality inventories – designed to help you better understand your work-related interests and personality strengths.

Your career assessment results can also be useful to you in preparing for the interview, as well as developing your cover letter and resume.

- **SIGI 3:** Accessible through the CS web site, the **Assessments** section of **SIGI 3** assists you in better understanding your work values, interests, and activities.
- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** - learn contributions of your “type” to the work organization, your communication, leadership, and team work styles. A Career Counselor can help you use your MBTI profile information to better communicate what you have to offer in an interview!
- **COPS Interest Inventory** - clarify fields of interest you may want to consider in your job search.
- Receive lists of careers based on your **SIGI 3, MBTI, and COPS**, and research these careers on web sites below.

CAREER INFORMATION - ON CS WEB SITE

SIGI 3: Occupational Information – This section of **SIGI 3** provides information on 100's of careers! **SIGI 3** provides information for those just beginning a job search, or making a job or career change.

The **Occupational Outlook Handbook, O*NET, and What Can I Do With This Major?** are additional online resources accessible via the CS web site.

THE ABOVE RESOURCES PROVIDE INFORMATION ON JOB DESCRIPTIONS, EDUCATION AND SKILLS REQUIRED, SALARY INFORMATION, JOB MARKET PROJECTIONS, AND MORE!

Additionally, the **Job Boards** link under the Career Counseling drop-down menu provides links to dozens of **job search web sites!**

THE INTERVIEW!

- **Determine ahead of time where you'll interview, and how long it will take you to arrive there!**
 - Arrive early – approximately 15 minutes – check your appearance in restroom.
- Introduce yourself to the secretary/receptionist and inform her/him that you have an interview with Mr./Ms. (name of interviewer) at (time).
 - Follow the interviewer's lead. When the he/she greets you, pause a moment and allow them to initiate the handshake, so as not to appear you are dominating the interview. If they do not, you may initiate it. **Always offer a firm handshake!**
- Make and maintain eye contact! Show enthusiasm! Be a good listener, and be alert to nonverbal cues from interviewer indicating when you should stop talking.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS INTERVIEWER MAY ASK YOU, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR RESPONSES!

- ***Tell me about yourself.***

This is an open-ended question often asked to “break the ice.” Keep your response brief (less than two to three minutes), and focus on highlights of your educational and work experiences. It is suggested that you start with your most recent accomplishment, such as getting your college degree, perhaps why you chose your major, and discuss some of the courses you completed that pertain to the requirements of the job, as well as any relevant team projects on which you have worked in your classes. Then, discuss related work experiences and involvement in student organizations (if applicable). Make sure you mention the specific knowledge and skills you've acquired in these experiences, and how they will contribute to your being successful in the position (this could be developed into a “closing statement” to summarize what you've just discussed. Limit disclosing personal information as this is not pertinent to your ability to perform on the job (e.g., DO NOT mention your age, marital status, children, health, etc.).

- ***Which college course or courses have you enjoyed the most, and why? The least? Why?***

For the courses you liked the most, discuss those that allowed you to develop knowledge/skills the employer is seeking for the position, if possible. Or, choose courses that allowed you to grow intellectually and/or interpersonally – such as a course that allowed you to develop the ability to view things from different perspectives, or the opportunity to work as part of a team on a special project.

For the courses you liked the least, you may state that there were no courses you disliked; that you enjoyed all of your courses because you learned something in each. Or, you may choose a course that **does not** relate to the position - such as algebra if you are interviewing for a social work position. Although you should be able to explain **why** you disliked it – even if just to say that algebra is a subject in which you have little interest - still try to end on a positive note; for example, by stating that although you didn't particularly *like* algebra, the course allowed you to improve your critical thinking skills. Another response could be that, although you did not have an interest in the course, you chose to view it as a challenge, and that you applied yourself, determined to persevere and succeed in the course. And you did!

- ***Name three of your greatest strengths.***

Remember to answer this question based on how it is asked. If the interviewer asks for three strengths, name them – for example: “Communication skills, organizational skills, and problem-solving skills.” The interviewer may ask another form of this question: “Name **three words** your co-workers would use to describe you.” In this case, your response should consist of three words: “Organized, detailed, and determined,” for example. Also, be able to **provide examples** of how you've successfully applied these strengths to resolve a problem situation (see “Behavioral Interviewing”).

- ***What is your greatest weakness?***

Design your response so that your weakness is really a “positive” in disguise. For example, you may refer to your tendency to approach a task or project with the attitude, “If you want it done right, do it yourself,” but then you find that you are not managing your time effectively, nor delegating appropriately so that your subordinates are learning responsibility on the job. Then, describe a situation in which you did NOT take this approach, and the positive results that occurred from your “new” approach.

OR, you can address this question from a personal or professional growth perspective. For example, you may tell the interviewer that “public speaking” is an area in which you do not have a lot of experience, but that each time you have had the opportunity to do a class presentation, you have worked to improve your public speaking skills. Be able to describe specific techniques you've used to improve in this area, and discuss successful outcomes. In a sense, you are not directly responding by naming a “weakness;” but you are alluding to an area that you recognized you needed to improve upon.

However, NEVER choose a characteristic, skills, etc., that is required for the job; for example, do not use the “public speaking” example if interviewing for a marketing, sales, public relations, etc., position. OR, do not use the “If you want it done right, do it yourself” example above, if applying for a management position, as managers must manage their time effectively, and delegate work tasks appropriately.

- ***Tell me what you have learned from your involvement in extracurricular activities.***

Focus on the knowledge and skills required for the job in responding to this question, and tailor your response accordingly. Also, if you served on campus activities or community service committees as part of membership in a student organization, discuss these experiences and what they taught you (team work, leadership skills, communication skills, ability to plan and organize activities, etc.). Be able to provide real-life examples: "I learned to work effectively as part of a team, for example..." and then provide specifics as to what you accomplished, and how!

- ***Which of your work experiences has been most rewarding? Why? Least rewarding? Why?***

Again, relate positive work experiences to the requirements of the job for which you are interviewing. In other words, focus on the knowledge/skills you acquired in a past job and describe how such knowledge and skills will allow you to be effective in this position. As for "least rewarding" experiences, NEVER say anything negative about a former employer, professor, etc. You may indicate (as with the "favorite courses" question above) that you have learned something from each job you've held, OR, if a job did not offer opportunity for you to learn or grow professionally, you may relate this information to the interviewer; however, still attempt to find something positive about the job, and communicate this to the employer!

- ***Describe your leadership style.***

This statement may be offered primarily for management or administrative positions; however, it is suggested that you think about situations in which you have exercised leadership abilities, exactly what steps you took to serve as a leader, and the positive results that came from those efforts - for example, leading a class team project, a student organization activity or event, training new employees at work, motivating others in volunteer experiences, etc. Think in terms of guiding/motivating people, AND managing tasks – both are crucial elements of leadership. Also, even though the position for which you are interviewing may **not** require you to supervise others, you should still view your role and the scope of your duties as requiring leadership skills - i.e., you should think of yourself as a leader of your area of responsibility, even if you do not have anyone "working under you."

- ***Describe an accomplishment, and how you achieved it. What does "success" mean to you?***

Choose to describe an accomplishment that demonstrates the setting of a goal, and commitment to and perseverance in achieving that goal. Provide a specific example from college, work, or extracurricular activities. Describe the process you went through to achieve that goal, and what learned "along the way." OR, choose to describe an obstacle that you overcame, perhaps a challenge for you in one of the aforementioned areas of your life, and how you addressed and met that challenge successfully. Also, your accomplishment does not have to be something the "changed the world"! Anything that illustrates positive qualities about you and results from your efforts is enough!

Regarding your definition of "success," let your response reflect your values – that is, what basic attitudes and beliefs you possess regarding life, career, yourself, and others.

- ***Do you work well under pressure?***

Answer in the positive: "Yes, I work very well under pressure. In fact, pressure can generate a certain energy level that can be the driving force for getting things done. It can also be the source of creativity in solving problems." Remember too, that this question can also be used to learn more about your ability to manage your time effectively, to multitask, to organize and prioritize your responsibilities. You may want to mention that you always try to effectively plan, organize, and accomplish your tasks in a timely manner so that if something unexpected occurs that requires an impending deadline, you will not have a lot of unfinished business that would prevent you from meeting the deadline.

- ***Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate.***

Again, let your response reflect your basic core values, then provide a specific example of a positive relationship you've experienced with a former, or current, supervisor. You should **also** answer this question from a supervisory perspective, that is, with yourself in the role of supervisor, if you have had such an experience. If you haven't, you may still address the approach you would take if you are placed in a supervisory position over others. Note that this question may be an opportunity for you to elaborate on your leadership and team work styles. Also, DO NOT compare "good supervisors" you've had to "bad supervisors"!

NEVER say anything negative about a person, departmental or company operations, etc.

- ***Why do you have a gap in employment from _____ to _____?***

College students can always explain a gap in employment as a deliberate move to spend more time focusing on their studies.

- ***Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your career goals?***

Be careful with your response to this question. DO NOT describe career goals which will take you away from the current job opportunity. In other words, do not state that you plan to pursue an advanced degree if you know (or don't know) whether this is what the company/organization with which you are interviewing is expecting, or if they can provide adequate reward for such an accomplishment. Instead, use this question as an opportunity to emphasize your strong desire for a career path with THIS company. If, however, you are **not** certain you want to work for this employer, keep your response more general and discuss your "overall" professional growth. E.g., "I am looking for the opportunity to continue to develop professionally, and in a direction that will benefit my employer. I hope to advance based on my performance in contributing to an organization's goals."

- ***What do you know about our company/organization? Why do you want to work here?***

This frequently asked question begs you to DO YOUR HOMEWORK in researching the company/organization THOROUGHLY before interviewing. The type of information you should gather in your research is outlined in the "**How Do I Research Companies?**" document on the Career Services web site, under the **Career Counseling** drop-down menu.

- ***What do you have to offer to this position/company that would "set you apart" from other applicants?***

Of course you cannot know the qualifications of the other candidates. However, this question presents a great opportunity for you to highlight, in a summary statement, what you have to offer, and you should base your response on the research you have done on the position and the company. You should also prepare for this question by carefully listening to the interviewer describe the position, the company, and the qualifications sought, which he/she will most likely do at some point during the interview.

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

You should refrain from asking questions until the interviewer asks you for questions (this opportunity usually takes place at the conclusion of the interview). An exception to this "rule" may occur if you do not understand, or need clarification of, a question you are asked during the interview, in which case you may ask the interviewer to explain. Following are some appropriate questions for you to ask – and DO ASK QUESTIONS – this shows interest and initiative!

- What qualifications do you think are necessary to be successful in this job? What majors do you usually hire?
- Could you describe the training period/program? How would I be supervised? My performance evaluated?
- What are the opportunities for advancement? (if you haven't been able to determine this from your research)
- Does the company encourage participation in professional organizations? Continuing education activities?
- When can I expect to hear from you regarding your hiring decision?

INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **DO NOT** initiate discussion of salary, vacation, or benefits during the first interview.
- **DO NOT** push for an early decision by mentioning the other opportunities you have awaiting you.
- **DO NOT** ask for feedback on your interview performance.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Expect to encounter this interview technique – commonly utilized by employers. “Behavioral” questions are designed to probe applicants’ past behavior in work situations, on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. To prepare, think in terms of a challenging or problem situation, how you **assessed** the situation (including various perspectives you considered in order to effectively address it), **actions** you took to resolve it, and the **positive results** that came from your efforts. Be specific when presenting this information to the employer.

There are three basic types of behavioral questions you may encounter:

- 1) The behavioral question could address a specific skill you’ve mentioned on your resume (such as communication skills). The employer might ask, “Could you give me an example of how you successfully applied your communication skills?” or, “Have you ever had to “sell” an idea to someone, and if so, how did you accomplish this?”, OR, the question may be more general in nature, such as,
- 2) “Have you ever experienced a difficult or challenging situation, and if so, please describe the situation and how you successfully handled it,” or, it could be a situational type question such as,
- 3) “What would you do if _____?” and then a hypothetical problem situation would be presented to you to address.

Complete the following “exercise” to help you begin to understand behavioral interview questions.

My three greatest strengths:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Examples of how I have successfully applied those strengths in an academic, work, or extracurricular setting:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Following are skills employers generally look for, and behavioral questions addressing each skill area.

Decision Making & Problem Solving

- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- How did you make the decision to come to Southeastern and to major in _____.

Leadership

- Give me an example of a situation in which you exercised effective leadership abilities.
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach?

Motivation (of yourself and others)

- Give an example of how you motivated your co-workers or classmates, as for a team project.
- Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past, that you successfully reached.

Communication

- Give an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with a customer/client.
- Have you ever had to “sell” an idea to your co-workers or a group? How did you do it? Did they “buy” it?

Interpersonal Skills

- What have you done in past situations to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual you’ve worked with, and how you worked with them.

Planning and Organization

- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Conduct a self-evaluation of interview: make notes on your performance and questions which were difficult for you to answer
- Write a thank you note within two days of your interview (see following example)
- Keep in touch – it is appropriate to call if you haven't heard from the employer within the time frame you were given to expect a response

ALWAYS return calls/answer emails from prospective employers. Even if you're not interested in the position, such a professional courtesy can leave a positive impression of you, and, there may be other opportunities for you with that company in the future. Also, make sure the **message** on your **answering machine** is professional, and answer the phone in an enthusiastic, positive voice.

ALWAYS send a thank you letter after a job interview. A handwritten letter, on a note card with a conservative design, is preferable; a typewritten letter is acceptable. Emailed thank you messages are generally acceptable, although a handwritten note is preferable to either of the above.

March 2, 2007

James R. Stark, Recruiting Manager
Aramark, Inc.
2290 Rue Benet
New Orleans, LA 70000

Dear Mr. Stark:

Thank you for the interview yesterday for the Marketing Assistant position at Aramark. Aramark offers opportunities which strongly parallel my interests and career goals. The interview with you confirmed my initial positive impressions of your company, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for you.

Again, thank you for your consideration. If you need any additional information, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gail Theriot

Other Job Search/Interview Tips

It's **extremely** important for you to organize your job search, and a critical element to organizing your search is organizing your **employer information**; more specifically, maintaining a record of:

- Employers you have contacted, including the company/organization name, employer representative's name and job title, and contact info such as address, phone, and email;
- How you learned of the position, a copy of the job ad, as well as a printout of information on the job from your research on the company/organization web site and/or the CS web site online career information resources (SIGI 3, OOH, O*Net); and the application deadline;
- A copy of the cover letter and resume you sent (as you will need to tailor each cover letter to the specific job for which you apply, and you may even have more than one version of your resume, if you are targeting more than one type of work);
- Methods by which you have contacted/interacted with the employer and dates of these contacts; estimated time frame for when you should hear back from employer both after application and/or if interviewed, when you should learn of the employer's hiring decision, AND a copy of the thank you note sent.

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS - FOR WOMEN

The Jewelry

- Seven pieces of jewelry maximum – count gold or jeweled buttons as jewelry
- One earring per ear – should be small, not dangling
- Watch – dress, not sports

The Hosiery

- Neutral colors only: taupe, off black, navy, off white – avoid textures

The Suit

- A business suit – matching jacket and skirt – is **most** appropriate – not a dress!
- Pantsuits are acceptable except for the more conservative employers, such as banks and accounting firms
- Should be conservative color – solid or small pattern – black, navy, gray, brown, taupe
- Should fit – not too tight or too loose; avoid fabrics that wrinkle easily, such as linen
- Blouse should be conservative to medium color – not bright color
- Avoid wearing pants to the interview! No short skirts – hem should be longer than mid-thigh!

The Shoes

- Closed toe ONLY! No sandals – even those with heels
- Heels 1 inch to 2 ½ inches high - conservative colors only – no gold, silver, red, etc.
- No “spiked” heels – should be comfortable for walking

The Purse

- Carry either a purse or briefcase – but not both – should be neutral color
- A nice portfolio containing a note pad and extra copies of your resume may be carried with purse

The Make-up/Hair

- Less is more
- Go easy on the blush, eyeshadow and lipstick
- Wear little or no perfume
- If hair is longer than shoulder length, wear pulled back from face

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS - FOR MEN

The Jewelry

- Less is more
- Wedding band/watch is sufficient
- Small and simple cuff links are acceptable

The Socks

- Nice, thick material; dark, solid or small pattern
- Long enough to hide leg hair when legs are crossed

The Suit

- Always wear a suit! Expensive is not necessarily better – should be proper fit
- Wool at least 55%; medium to dark colors, solids or conservative stripes
- Jacket length: should pass “finger curl test”
- Tip of jacket sleeve should fall 5 inches above tip of thumb when thumb is extended down
- Shirt: pastels, solids, and conservative stripes are acceptable
- Shirt sleeve: should extend one half inch below jacket sleeve edge

The Shoes

- Should be leather; should be lace-up; should shine, shine!

The Tie

- Small, repetitive pattern or solid – no “theme” ties (e.g., “Tabasco”)
- End of tie should touch top of belt - should contain loop in which to insert small end of tie

The Other

- Carry nice portfolio containing a note pad and extra copies of your resume; carry nice pen
- Wristwatch should be dress, not sports
- Use aftershave sparingly – and no cologne