

INTERVIEWING AND POST-INTERVIEW CORRESPONDENCE GUIDE

Naropa University Career Services

Sarah Steward, career services coordinator
Arapahoe Campus ~ Allen Ginsberg Library 6210, second floor
303.245.4863 ~ [ssteward@naropa.edu](mailto:sseward@naropa.edu) ~ www.naropa.edu/careerservices

You have an interview scheduled and need to prepare for it. Career Services created this guide to provide you with helpful advice to prepare for a successful interview.

What is an interview?

It may seem obvious what an interview is, and quite simply it is a conversation and exchange of information between you and the person interviewing you to determine if you are a right fit for the position and if the organization is a right fit for you. Therefore, an interview is a mutually evaluative process, so above all you should be yourself and do the best you can. Your role is as follows:

1. To provide adequate and accurate information about yourself, experiences, and qualifications. If you don't know an answer, be honest and ask for clarification.
2. To gather information about the position and organization to make thoughtful and informed decisions.

Where do I begin?

Know the Organization

To get started on the process of preparing for your interview, you should first research information about the organization. The employer will expect you to know basic information about the organization from the services and/or products it offers to the location of the organization and its branches to its financial status. You can gain a wealth of information about an organization simply by visiting its website, or you might visit your local library or write the organization to request information. You might review its mission statement, review job vacancies, consider the organization's current events or projects, or scan its annual reports. Also, you might speak with people who work in the industry or organization. Conducting research will increase your knowledge of the organization, increase your confidence, and convince the employer you are interested in working for the organization

Know the Position

In addition to gathering information about the organization, you should also familiarize yourself with the position for which you are interviewing and know the responsibilities and requirements of it.

Know Yourself

Now that you know information about the organization and position, it is time to consider how your values, interests, and experiences intersect with the organization and the specific position. You must sell yourself during the interview. You will be most successful if you have identified your career goals (employers look favorably upon candidates with well-defined goals), the skills you would bring to the organization and how your experiences and education developed your skills and prepared you to make a meaningful contribution to the organization.

Think About Your Responses

Although you do not want to memorize your responses, it is a good idea to PRACTICE answering potential interview questions to build your confidence and pin point ideas you would like to cover in the interview. You may also schedule a mock interview with Career Services. As you prepare for your interview think about your responses to some common interview questions:

- ◆ Tell me about yourself.
- ◆ Describe a time when you worked on a team project. How did you contribute?
- ◆ What do you know about our organization?
- ◆ Think back to a situation in which you had to resolve a conflict. Tell me how you did it?
- ◆ Why do you want to work for us?
- ◆ If a client (or customer or student) becomes angry with you verbally, what would you do?
- ◆ What interests you specifically about the position?
- ◆ What accomplishment at work has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- ◆ What unique qualities or abilities would you bring to this job?
- ◆ What do you want from supervision?
- ◆ Why did you select your major?
- ◆ What is your supervisory style?
- ◆ What are your major strengths and weaknesses? (When you reveal your weaknesses, think about examples of how you have addressed them and improved upon them.)
- ◆ How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- ◆ Give me an example about a time you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- ◆ What is not on your resume that you would like to tell us?
- ◆ Tell me about a time when you had to get someone to accept your idea. What did you do? Why?
- ◆ What have you read recently?
- ◆ Tell me about a time you found errors in your work. What caused those errors? How did you handle the situation?
- ◆ What are your long- and short-term goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
- ◆ What leadership roles have you had?
- ◆ What other employers are you interviewing with?
- ◆ Can you describe some circumstances where you wish you would have behaved differently with a fellow student or co-worker?
- ◆ Do you have any questions for us? OR What would you like to know about us?
- ◆ Tell me about a mistake you made in a previous job and how you handled it?

Prepare Sample Questions to Ask the Interviewer

As stated previously in this guide, the interview is a chance for you to interview the organization, so it is good practice to prepare questions for the interviewer that can help you make a meaningful decision. Organizations also evaluate candidates on the basis of the questions candidates ask during the interview. However, if the interviewer seems pressed for time, you may want to limit the number of questions you ask. The following questions are samples for you to consider:

- ◆ How would you describe the community (or environment) of your organization (or university or program)?
- ◆ What are the day-to-day duties involved in this job?
- ◆ In your organization, is this position more analytical or people-oriented?
- ◆ What is the nature of the training program and level of supervision given in the early stages of employment?
- ◆ How are performance reviews or evaluations given?
- ◆ Can you describe the clients (or students or customers or associates) you work with?
- ◆ What skills are you seeking in the individual selected for this position (or program)?
- ◆ Do you have any in-house professional development seminars? If so, what topics are typically covered?
- ◆ What are some of the typical career paths followed by others who have been in this position? What is a realistic time frame for advancement?
- ◆ What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- ◆ What are your organization's strengths and weaknesses?

Questions that show your interest in the organization as a whole are desirable. Phrase the questions to show your knowledge of the organization:

- ◆ I read in the newspaper (or online) that you are... How will this impact...?
- ◆ I know your organization is committed to... Will you explain more about these opportunities?
- ◆ What are your organization's plans for future growth?

What interview types, forms, and styles exist?

Types of Interviews

Broadly speaking there are two types of interviews: screening and selection.

A screening interview is usually the first interview and tends to be relatively short with a set list of questions the organization will ask each candidate. It is intended primarily to identify top candidates and eliminate other candidates from further consideration.

Following a screening interview, an organization may invite you on-site for a selection interview, which is typically longer and more thorough and designed to identify the most qualified candidates for the position. You may also meet with many people. You may have to go through a series of selection interviews before the organization offers you a position or releases you from the interview process.

Forms of Interviews

The first form of interview we typically think about is the one-on-one interview where you exchange questions and answers with one person in an organization for a set amount of time.

Another form of interview is the panel interview. In this format, several people will interview at one time. Organizations use this form of interview when teamwork is a major requirement of the position, and the interview may be face paced. It is alright for you to slow the pace and pause to consider your answers. Attempt to maintain good eye contact with everyone in the room.

A successive interview is essentially a series of one-on-one interviews, which requires meeting with one person after another to discuss the position. This takes a lot of energy, and it is good to be mindful of your energy with the first person as with the last.

A final form of interview is the group interview. During a group interview, the organization interviews multiple candidates for the same position. In this setting, remember to consider what makes you unique and consider the nature of the position and what skills you need to highlight the most.

Styles of Interviews

Now that we have covered types and forms of interviews, it is time to move on to styles of interviews. Although there are many styles of interviews, in this section, we will cover three basic styles: traditional, behavioral, and case.

Organizations most commonly use the traditional interview style, where the interviewer asks you a set of questions based on the position and your resume.

A behavioral interview style, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior. In this style the interviewer(s) will ask you for specific examples in order to gain insights as to whether you will be successful in the position by saying something like, "Give me an example of when..." A helpful mechanism to use when answering behavioral style questions is S.T.A.R.:

- S – Situation: detail a pertinent situation
- T – Tasks Involved: detail the tasks involved
- A – Action Taken: detail the actions you took
- R – Results: detail the results you achieved

The third style is a case interview. In this style, the interviewer will give you a case or problem and ask you to offer a solution or recommendation. This style is common in interviews for consulting. The purpose is to assess your style and problem-solving abilities not to find the "one" correct answer.

What else should I consider?

What to Wear

First impressions hold a lot of weight with employers, so you will want to look professional for any interview and error on the side of being over-dressed.

Be Punctual

Arrive a few minutes early and introduce yourself to the reception person courteously and with respect. His or her opinion counts! Maintain eye contact, smile, and shake hands.

Introductions

Again, greet your interviewer with a smile, firm hand shake, and direct eye contact. Note the interviewer's name and use it during the interview. Always address the interviewer as "Mr." or "Ms." or "Dr." until she or he asks you to use a first name.

What to Bring

We advise that you always bring extra copies of your resume. If you have any updates to your resume, add them, and give the revised version to the interviewer. You may also choose to bring a copy of your transcript, list of

relevant coursework, or a portfolio containing examples of your work. You might also bring a copy of your reference list with contact information (i.e., names, titles, work addresses, work phones, and work emails). If you carry a pen and paper, you can take notes following the interview to reflect on the experience.

Salary and Benefits

We do not advise bringing up salary or benefits in an interview. If such a discussion occurs, the interviewer should initiate it. If you would like to have an appropriate salary range in mind, you can investigate salary levels by using the Occupational Outlook Handbook, published by the U.S. Department of Labor, or by visiting <http://www.salary.com>. Normally, there will be time to negotiate a salary after the employer offers you a position.

Conclusion

Most interviewers conclude by indicating when you can expect to receive further information on your application status. If this does not happen, it is OK to ask. This will give you a time frame for when you should follow up with the interviewer. Follow-up efforts may help distinguish you from less conscientious candidates. Ask the interviewer for her or his business card or contact information as a means to facilitate your follow-up process. Also, in concluding the interview, express your interest in the position (if you still are interested) and always thank the interviewer for her or his time and consideration.

Follow-up

After your interview, you should send a typed or handwritten thank you note to the interviewer(s); it should convey your gratitude for the interviewer's time, restate your qualifications, and indicate your enthusiasm for the position. If you remember something specifically significant about the interview, you may want to mention that as well for a personal touch. A sample thank you note follows:

<p>2700 Glenwood Court Boulder, CO 80301 September 10, 2008</p> <p>Mr. Seth Franklin Director Top Notch Services 4270 Park Avenue Denver, CO 80010</p> <p>Dear Mr. Franklin:</p> <p>Thank you for taking time to share details with me about the Assistant Director position at Top Notch Services in yesterday's interview.</p> <p>After talking with your staff and further investigating your well-established organization, I am eager to reaffirm my interest in the position. My familiarity with your services and my considerable customer service experiences would make me a strong member of the Top Notch Services team.</p> <p>I hope to hear from you soon regarding your final decision and thank you, again, for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Sincerely, Chris Smith Chris Smith</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Thank-You Letter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convey gratitude for time spent on the interview• Letter should be sent within 1-2 days of interview• Restate your qualifications and interest• Indicate interest in hearing from them• Use standard business formatting	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Basic Interview Guidelines</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Bring extra copies of your resume and samples of your work to the interview if appropriate.◆ Be sure to have directions to the interview site and arrive 10-15 minutes early.◆ Bring the interviewer's telephone number in the event you get lost.◆ Dress professionally.◆ This is your chance to make a positive impression, so be at your best!◆ Relax. Remember the interview is a two-way conversation.◆ If you have questions about interviewing or would like practice, contact the career services coordinator at 303.245.4863 or steward@naropa.edu.
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If you are no longer interested in the position, you should follow up with the interviewer by sending a withdrawal letter and thanking the interviewer for her or his time.

How do I evaluate my interview?

Evaluating your interview is important for you as you make your decision whether this is a position you are still interested in or not. Shortly following the interview, take time to consider your impressions. Each interview should be a learning opportunity. The following questions may help guide your reflection:

- ◆ Was I able to develop a good rapport with the interviewer?
- ◆ Did I effectively communicate my skills as they relate to the position?
- ◆ Did my questions reflect a thorough knowledge of the organization and the position?
- ◆ How could I improve my interviewing skills?

Accepting an Offer

When you receive an offer for employment from an organization, be sure to take time to evaluate the offer thoroughly. Sometimes you may need an extension of time to consider an offer or a number of offers. If you feel you need this time, don't be afraid to ask for it. Most employers will accommodate your request. As you consider the offer, think about the essential functions of position, the location of employment, and the starting date.

If you decide to accept an offer of employment, you have committed yourself to that organization. It is unprofessional to renege on such an agreement in all but the most unusual circumstances. Contact the other organizations to which you have applied and notify them of your decision, so they can take your application out of consideration. Do this with great care because you may want to work for them in the future.

In your letter of acceptance to the organization, you should first reference the conversation about the offer, start date, salary, and benefits. Express your appreciation and enthusiasm for joining the organization. A sample letter of acceptance appears at the right.

Finally, let your reference writers know that you have found employment and thank them for their help. Remember to keep in touch with your reference writers for future job searches.

2700 Glenwood Court
Boulder, CO 80301
July 1, 2008

Ms. Sandra Mitchell
Director of Social Services
Park Medical Center
5000 West 39th Street
Denver, CO 80011

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

It is with sincere pleasure that I accept the position of Medical Social Worker with Park Medical Center at an annual salary of \$30,000 with benefits. As we discussed last Friday, I will be reporting for work on Monday, July 23, in the Social Services Department.

As stated in your offer, I understand that after my initial orientation I will be assigned temporary office space. I also understand that the Center is currently undergoing renovations and that I can expect to have a more permanent office by the first of the year.

I greatly appreciate your consideration and efforts on my behalf. Thank you again for your assistance during the interview process. I look forward to working with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Dan Diaz

Dan Diaz

Letter of Acceptance

- Accept the offer
- Outline what you understand to be the parameters of your employment (salary, days of vacation, benefits package, compensation for moving, if provided, include details of any negotiated items)
- Confirm your start date
- Express your appreciation and your pleasure at joining the organization
- Use standard business formatting

Declining an Offer

As exciting as an offer can be, sometimes our intuition tells us that it is not the right fit for us. If after contemplating an employment offer you find that it is not the right fit for you, you can then draft a letter declining the offer. It is a matter of common courtesy, as well as good business practice, to notify an employer once you have made a decision to reject an offer of employment. Express your appreciation for the interest and confidence the employer showed in making you an offer. A sample letter declining an offer follows:

2700 Glenwood Court
Boulder, CO 80301
August 15, 2008

Ms. Jessica Cole
Vice President
Environmental Agency
3820 Carter Avenue South
Denver, CO 80012

Dear Ms. Cole:

Thank you for your recent offer of employment as the Environmental Specialist with your agency. Although it was a difficult decision, I have decided to decline your offer at this time.

As you know, my primary interest is in conservation. The position I accepted will allow me to further develop my skills, specifically in this area.

I greatly appreciate your consideration, time, and effort throughout the selection process and wish you the best.

Sincerely,

Tyson Stanley

Tyson Stanley

Letter Declining an Offer

- Decline the offer
- Convey your appreciation for the offer and the organization's interest in you
- Use standard business formatting

Follow-Up to Rejection

- Acknowledge the employer's decision
- Keep future prospects open
- Request feedback
- Use standard business formatting

2700 Glenwood Court
Boulder, CO 80301
January 22, 2008

Mr. Roland Sand, President
Conflict Mediation Consultants
7035 Wayzata Boulevard
Denver, CO 80011

Dear Mr. Sand:

I recently received notification of your decision to hire another candidate for the position of Community Mediator. I want to thank you for considering me through the final interviewing process. At your convenience, I would appreciate receiving any feedback you would be willing to give regarding my credentials, experience, or the interview.

I learned a great deal about Conflict Mediation Consultants through the interview process, and I have high regard for your organization and would welcome any future employment opportunities.

I hope we have the opportunity to meet again. Thank you for your efforts on my behalf.

Sincerely,

Carmen Foster

Carmen Foster

Facing Rejection

Rejection is a part of any interview and job search process. Remember to not take rejection as a rejection of you as a person. Even the best interview may not result in a job offer. If you are still interested in the organization, make sure you send that message in a follow-up letter and ask to be considered for future openings.

Corresponding with an organization after a rejection is probably the most difficult of all job correspondence. In your letter, acknowledge the decision of the employer. Express your thanks for their consideration and be sure to keep the door open to future prospects. While organizations have varying practices in sharing feedback with candidates, it is always good to request it. At the very least, this important information will help you prepare for future interviews. A sample follow-up letter is on this page.