Interviewing Skills

The interview is a two-way process! The interview gives the employer the opportunity to meet you in person and to evaluate the "total" you. This includes your attitude, appearance, personality, confidence, knowledge about yourself, and knowledge about the company, as well as your basic ability to do the job. Chemistry is very important -- you are hired by an individual, not by a company!

Types of Interviews

Style
- Resume-based - Interviewer asks you questions based on the experiences cited on your resume
- Behavior-based - Interviewer asks how you behaved or would behave in a certain situation. What would you do if...?
- Case-based - Interviewer outlines a problem and asks how you might solve it. He/she is interested in your thought process and not (necessarily) in the solution.

Method
- Screening vs. in-depth (screening is shorter, more general. It is intended to make sure you meet the minimum job qualifications. If so, a next interview may follow.)
- One-on-one vs. panel/group (eye contact is key for panel/group)
- Via telephone or video vs. in person (insist on in person, if possible)

How to Prepare

Know yourself
- Priorities, values, interests, strengths (think relevancy!)
- Prepare questions that will help you determine if this is a good match for you
- Have in mind concrete examples of your successes
- Be aware of salary range (but try not to discuss this until much later in the process)

Research organization and job
- Know the skills and experience required for the job; be prepared to outline why you are a good match
- Understand the organization's position/mission

Practice
- Review potential questions, have 2-3 anecdotes for each
- Complete a mock interview with the Career Center or a knowledgeable colleague

Make the right impression
- Dress the part (suit, clean shirt, no dangly earrings, no low-cut tops)
- Appearance (groom your hair, clean your fingernails, shine your shoes)
- Materials to take (resumes, references, portfolio/writing samples)
- Enthusiasm (firm handshake, eye contact throughout, lean forward, smile)
- Arrive early
The Interview

- When answering questions,
  - Be concrete
  - Be concise and summarize
  - Ask if you don't understand
  - Don't be afraid to take a moment to think about an answer
  - Be positive and animated/enthusiastic
  - Tie your past to your future (make everything relevant to how this will contribute to the new organization)
  - Demonstrate knowledge of the organization (parallel knowledge with your own experience)
- Ask questions!
- Get a business card so you have correct information for a thank you note
- Avoid inappropriate humor, talking about religion or politics (unless pertinent to the job), sexual innuendo or stereotyping

Illegal Questions

Questions that relate to gender, race, color, national origin, religion, age or disabilities are illegal, unless the employer can demonstrate that they relate to bona fide requirements of the job. Generally, questions about family planning and home responsibilities are also illegal. However, illegal questions often do get asked in interviews. Your immediate reaction might be to confront the interviewer about his/her right to ask such a question, but such a confrontation will probably kill your chances of getting the job. Simply refusing to answer is also very risky; few employers would give further consideration to any candidate refusing to answer a question. Of course, either of the tactics is fine if you have decided you don't want this job. If you do want the offer, then three possible strategies are to:
  - Answer honestly
  - State what you assume the employer hopes to learn by asking the question, and then answer in response to that assumption.
  - Deflect with humor

Follow Up

- Write a thank you (typed, hand written, or e-mail) to all interviewers
- Personalize the thank you note(s)
- Timing – send your thank you note within two days of the interview
- If typed, send the thank you letter in an 8x11 envelope so it doesn't have to be folded
- Hand deliver the thank you note/letter if delivering to a U.S. Government office where there is mail screening