

## Four Essential Steps to Prepare for Your Interview

### 1. Outline and practice answering the question “Tell me about yourself and why you are interested in this position at our company.”

All organizations will start interviews with some version of this question. Be prepared to answer it.

Your statement should contain:

#### **Who you are (30 seconds)**

- University attending
- Major and Year
- Professional interests
- Extracurricular Activities

#### **Your Professional Strengths/Accomplishments (30-45 seconds)**

- Related work experience, coursework, projects
- Leadership abilities
- Community involvement
- Overview of strong soft skills  
(interpersonal communication, team player, etc.)

#### **Your Objective (30-45 seconds)**

- Why you are interested in the job/organization
- What skills you can bring to the job/organization
- Link the opportunity to your overall career objective

See the example on the right and in the Interviews handout for more details

Writing is my passion. I decided to attend Hopkins for its top-ranked Writing Seminars program so I could focus on honing my writing skills. While at Hopkins I have sought out a variety of internships so I could explore different fields. I had an internship as a reporter at a regional paper, one as a journalist for a non-profit arts group, and one with a public relations firm. I have also written for the school paper for three years, and this year I am the Editor-in-Chief.

Through these experiences, I have demonstrated my ability to manage all aspects of a project. I relish the chance to produce work that has an impact. As you can see from my involvement in the Tutorial Project and Hopkins Fencing, when I take something on, I like to work hard and excel.

I'm interested in this position because it would allow me to combine my passion for writing and getting results within a non-profit setting. Your organization does inspiring work with families in Baltimore City. Its growth over the last few years is impressive. I'm especially drawn to your organization's entrepreneurial style. From talking to others at your organization, it seems like this a place for people who like to achieve in a goal-oriented, fast-paced environment. I'm very excited about the opportunity to talk with you today about this position and your organization.

Practice your response aloud until you have a two minute statement that reveals, who you are, your strengths, and your objective. See the Interviews handout for examples on how to answer that question.

### 2. Identify the qualifications, skills, experience and specific job duties outlined in the job description. Prepare to answer Behavioral Questions about all of these using the SAR method.

Employers believe that past behavior predicts how you would handle challenges while working for them. They will ask questions based on the skills, qualifications and job duties in the job description, such as

“Tell me about a time you demonstrated \_\_\_\_\_ skill,”

“Describe your experience with \_\_\_\_\_ task or job function.”

To answer questions about your experience and skills, it's important to use specific examples from the Situation, Action, and Results (SAR) format:

**S- Situation:** 15-20% of your total response

What was your objective? What was the context? What was the situation at hand?

**A- Action:** 70% of your total response

What did you do? How did you do it? Be specific. Target your answer to the skills the employer is seeking.

**R- Result:** 5-10% of your total response

What happened? What were the outcomes of your specific actions? What difference did you make?

What did you learn?

For each question the employer may ask, the Career Center recommends you outline three SARs for each one:

- 1 example from your classes
- 1 example from your work or internship experience
- 1 example from your extracurricular or volunteer activities

That way if they ask for a different example, you're prepared. Plus this task will also identify which experiences to focus on during the interview. For more detail on Behavioral interviews, and examples of questions targeting specific skill sets, see the Interviews handout.

### **3. Prepare 3-4 questions to ask the employer.**

They expect you to review their website, so don't ask questions that you can find out their website. Ask more detailed questions about the organization and the position. Do NOT ask about salary in the first round interview. For examples of questions, see the Interviews handout. For industry specific questions, Career Beam's online Industry guide has wonderful examples. Remember, you can write your questions down in your portfolio, so you can refer to them during the interview. Finally read the newspaper the night before, in case the company is in the news.

Have more questions about the interviewing process? The Career Center Interviews handout and career counselors can help you prepare.

### **4. Appearance Matters!**

You want to be remembered for what you say in an interview and not how you look. Don't let your appearance distract the interviewer. Employers want to hire employees that are professional, mature, and tidy in their appearance. You need:

- Grooming –Hair, skin, nails, and clothing should be neat, freshly cleaned and odor-free
- Dark Conservative Business Suit - Black, Charcoal Gray or Navy
- Minimal Jewelry/Accessories – Nothing distracting
- Dress Shirt (long-sleeve) or Dress Blouse
- Polished Shoes and Dress Socks/Hosiery that coordinate with suit
- Dark Conservative Portfolio and Pad for your resume

As you interview more frequently, buy a variety of blouses or dress shirts and ties to achieve a variety of looks, as well as one additional suit. That way if you have multiple interviews with a company over 2-3 days, you won't be wearing the same outfit every day. For detailed information on Business Professional dress, please consult the Career Center's website and the Interviews handout.

### **Detailed information on interviewing is available from the Johns Hopkins University Career Center**

In addition to the information in the Interviews handout and on the Career Center website, students can attend interviewing workshops and schedule individual interview preparation appointments with Career Center Counselors.