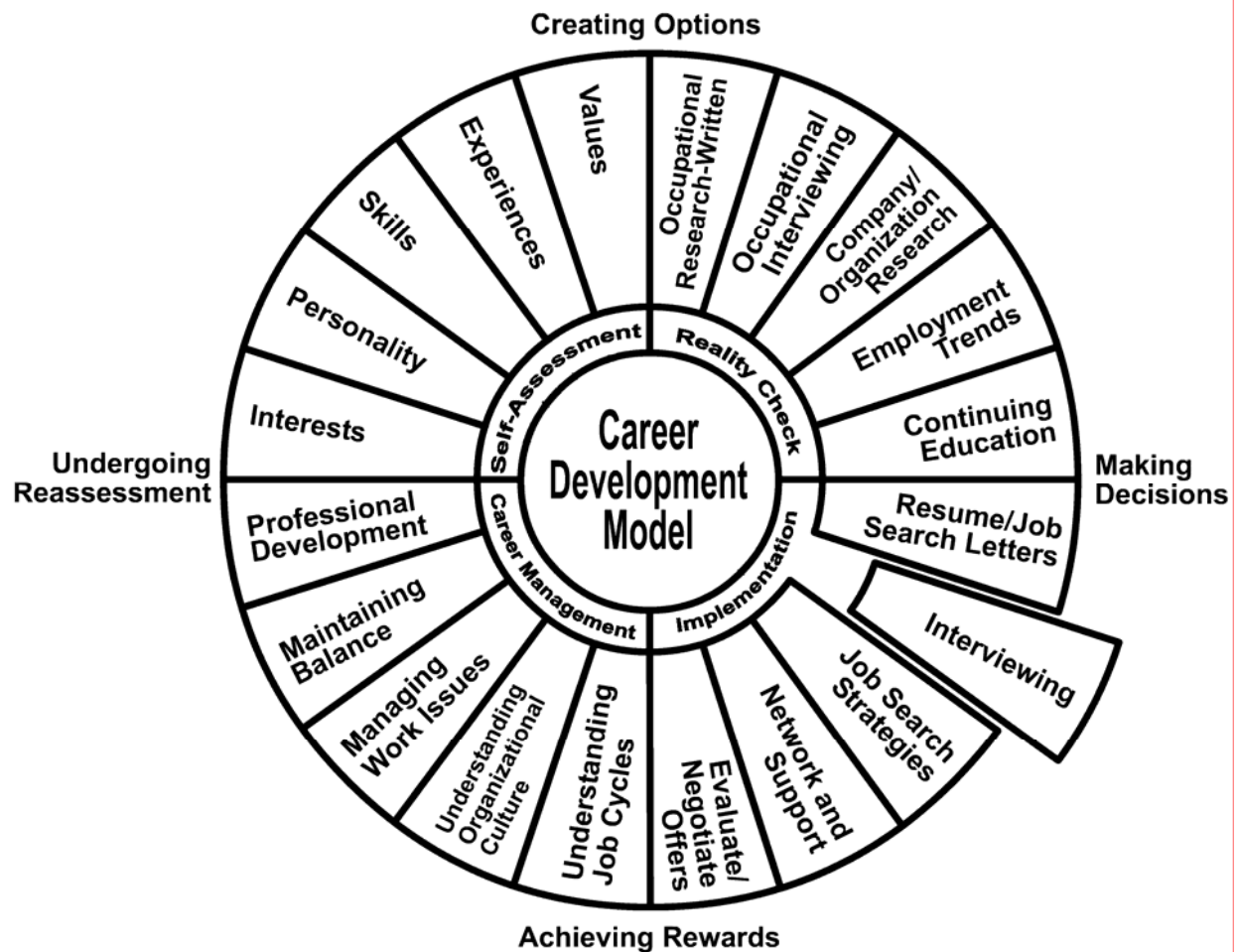


Interviewing Basics



University of St. Thomas Career Development Center
 Room 350, Murray Herrick Campus Center
 2115 Summit Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105-1096
 (651) 962-6761

career@stthomas.edu
<http://www.stthomas.edu/careerdevelopment>

What Employers Want to Know:

“Why should I hire you?”

“Will you be good at this if I do hire you?”

“Do you really want this job?”

It’s all about communication. You are being interviewed, which usually means that your written communication (i.e., cover letter and résumé) was sufficient to help you make the first cut. Now you must communicate in person and verbalize your interest, enthusiasm and qualification for the position.

“Why should I hire you?”

No set of “typical interview questions” will prepare you for an interview as well as *really knowing* how to answer this question. Even if this specific question is not asked in just these words, it is, nevertheless never too far from the interviewer’s mind. “*Why should I hire this person?*”

- Do you know *why* you want to do *what* you want to do?
- Can you *talk* about what will make you a strong candidate for a particular job or internship?

Understanding your skills, experience and interests and knowing how to articulate their fit with the needs of the employer, is critical to a successful interview.

The person picked may or may not be the most qualified candidate for the position. Often, the person selected is the best at communicating their fit with the position and the company.

“Will you be good at this if I do hire you?”

Again, it’s all about communication. Be prepared to talk about your previous experiences—in school, at work, in campus or volunteer involvement—what you’ve learned from them, and how steps so far have readied you for their organization.

Be prepared to give examples of previous successes and how they demonstrate readiness to meet the organization’s needs.

“Do you really want this job?”

Again, the employer may not ask the question using these words. They *are* looking for enthusiasm for the position and the organization, however.

Often people are a bit shy about using expressions, such as, “I’ve been really excited about the chance to interview for this job,” to open an interview or, “Based on our conversation I’m even more interested than I was before. What you’ve described sounds like an exciting place to work,” as the interview is wrapping up.

Saying “I’m really interested in this. When do you think you’ll have a decision made?” is not pushy! It is simply, effectively communicating your enthusiasm!

Use your own words, but explicitly communicate your enthusiasm for the position.

Before You Arrive:

How to prepare

What to wear

How to prepare

Qualifications/Needs Assessment, and ...

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH!

- Identify the key skills, qualities and experiences that the position requires.
- Now, going back to “Why should I hire you?” begin to consider how you are matches up with what the employer is seeking.
- Via the company’s Web site, other Internet resources, periodicals or other print materials, research the company’s:

Products... culture... markets... competitors... revenue... future projections... geographic locations...

...and whatever else you can find that will assist you in your ability to articulate the fit between your qualifications and their needs.

- Begin to think of examples—from school, from extracurricular involvement from part-time jobs—that will support your claims to possessing what the job requires. More about this will be discussed in the section on behavioral interviewing.

What to wear?

When in doubt, the safest choice for interview attire is traditional and conservative. Yes, you could feel a bit uncomfortable if you are dressed up and the interviewer is relatively casual. But, wouldn’t it be more awkward if you dress casually for the interview and the employer is in a nicely tailored suit?

Do some research before deciding what to wear. Look at the employer’s web site, notice if certain clothing appears to be standard with this company. A call to a company’s human resources department to ask about attire is also acceptable.

Finally, ask someone you trust to give you their honest opinion of your outfit, to make sure no small problems have escaped your notice.

Stages of the Interview:

Most interviews follow a format similar to the one below.

Introductory phase- “breaking the ice”

- This is your first chance to make an impression.
- Actively and enthusiastically engage from the start.
- Avoid brief, one-word responses.

Communicating your qualifications- “the interviewer’s questions for you”

- Expect questions regarding your goals, education, experience, interests and activities.
- Give specifics that back up your answers. Prove by example. (Read more about how to prepare to do this on page five of this document).
- Telling stories of your personal successes is *not* ‘bragging’ or ‘too aggressive.’
- Lead with the positive. Avoid anything that feels even vaguely negative.

Gathering more information about the position and company- “your questions for the interviewer”

- Research + Curiosity = Good Questions.
- Base your questions on the research you’ve done. (e.g., “I noticed on your Web page that you have a six month training program. Could you tell me more about that?” is a better question than “Could you tell me about your training program?”)

Termination phase- “closing the deal”

- Indicate enthusiasm for the job as well as appreciation for the opportunity to interview.
- Summarize what makes you especially interested in and qualified for the job.
- Don’t shy away from a strong closing. (e.g., “I ‘m very interested in this opportunity,” makes a stronger impression than, “This sounds interesting.”)
- Get a sense of what the next step in the process is.

Focused/Behavioral Answers:

CONTEST + ACTION + RESULTS = CAR

Many employers are trained in what is called behavioral or focused interviewing. The basic premise is to encourage the candidate to prove him or herself by telling stories of past accomplishments that suggest the probability of future successes. By being prepared to tell your own success stories you will be well positioned to answer many of the questions that are likely to be asked in any interview.

C - Describe the context.

In my first semester on campus, I had a job at the campus information desk. I was the first person that many campus visitors talked to. I had to direct people around a campus that I didn't even know myself yet, so doing the job right was a challenge.

A - What action did you take?

When the desk was slow I made a point of navigating the university's Web site, getting a sense of what departments were in what buildings and where those buildings were on campus. Plus, I made a point of seeking out the names of the different buildings as I went from class to class— even the smaller ones that were easy to miss.

R - What was the result?

Within a fairly short time I found that I was really familiar with the campus. Even my own boss—who'd been at the school for several years—would sometimes ask me where a particular room or department was.

Consider how this story could assist you in having strong responses to the typical interview questions below:

*“Give me an example of an accomplishment that you are proud of.”
(You might say, “I think I'm a good problem solver.”)*

*“What is your greatest strength?”
(You might answer, “I think I'm good at setting and meeting goals.”)*

*“We need people who have motivation. Talk about your work ethic.”
(You might answer, “I think most people who know me would agree that I'm really a hard worker.”)*

The short answers above are a start, but they lack substance. If you add to any one of these short answers, “*For instance, in my first semester on campus I had a job at the information desk...*” and complete the CAR story above, you really *prove* that you have what they are seeking!

More CAR examples:

C - At St. Thomas, I didn't do so well in my freshman year. I was trying to do too much and wasn't budgeting my time or setting priorities very well. My second semester grades were the wake up call I needed.

I knew that I needed to turn things around, and do it quickly.

A - When school started again the next fall, I formed a study group with a couple of friends who I knew from class. We met twice a week for two hours at a time. Also, I persuaded my roommates to set certain 'no TV' times in the room each night. Another big thing was learning that I didn't have to say 'yes' every time somebody asked if I wanted to go out.

R - Things turned around pretty quickly. By the end of my sophomore year, I'd brought my overall GPA above 3.0, I was on the Dean's list and I was getting a lot more out of my whole college experience.

C - In high school, I worked weekends at the pizza restaurant near my parents' home. Over time I did pretty much every job in the place.

A lot of part-time people come and go pretty quickly, and need to be trained. The owners were frustrated by how inefficient that could be.

A - I thought it would be a good idea to get the basic steps and procedures for each job down in writing, so one night I just started printing the things that I thought new employees ought to know into different sections of a spiral notebook—how to set up a table, turning the ovens off and on. I added more over time. Before I left for college, I put it all on a diskette so that the owners could update it.

R - I still work there during the summers, and they're still updating the basic information that I put together way back when in that old spiral notebook.

Be a strong candidate!

- 1) Have several CAR stories prepared before every interview.
- 2) Think about what your stories say about the various qualities you possess.
- 3) Review the list of "typical interview questions" below.
- 4) Consider how your stories can help you in adding substance to the questions you are likely to be asked.

Typical Interview Questions:

1) What are your major strengths?

2) Tell me about yourself.

Hint: mix a small amount of personal-
(e.g., “ I grew up in western Wisconsin”),

a small amount of educational-
(e.g., “I chose St. Thomas, due to its size and it being about two hours from my parents’—which felt about right—and I chose communication as a major because I thought it would be a good fit and would provide a range of options.”)

and a small amount of vocational-
(e.g., “I’ve had two internships in PR departments, which have been great experiences, so that’s one reason I’ve been really looking forward to talking with you today.”)

3) Name a weakness that you have.

Hint: think ‘not my greatest strength’ rather than ‘weakness.’ Pick something that may not come naturally for you, that you have worked on and improved.

4) Why should I hire you over other candidates?

5) Why do you want to go into this field?

6) Describe a situation where you had to juggle several difficult tasks.

7) Tell me about a time when you learned from a setback.

8) What role do you usually play on a team?

9) What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in this field?

10) Where do you see yourself in five years?

11) Why did you choose your major?

12) Tell me about a time when you had to use strong leadership skills.

13) What do you do when you’re not studying or working?

14) Tell me about an accomplishment in which you take pride.

15) How does your education relate to our needs?

16) Why do you want this job?

17) Why are you interested in this field?

18) Tell me about a situation when you had to work under pressure.

19) How do you feel about traveling/relocating?

20) What is your communication style?

Questions That You May Ask In An Interview:

- In almost all cases you should have access to information about the company and position before going into the interview.
- Your research about the opportunity is crucial for the part of the interview where the interviewer asks, “Do you have any questions for me today?”
- Research + Genuine Curiosity = Good Questions to which you might want to learn the answers.

Good questions to ask could include:

- I know your company has been successful in spite of the current slump in the economy. What do you think the reason is for that?
- Your training program sounds really extensive. What was your training experience like when you started your job?
- Do you have plans to expand the _____ department?
- The job description says that teamwork and communication skills are essential for this job. What other qualities do you see as important?
- What would a typical week look like?
- What have you liked most about working for _____?
- I know you’ve grown by 20% in the past five years. Do you see that type of growth continuing?
- What is your company’s philosophy regarding professional development?
- How are decisions made about who will be promoted within the organization?
- What qualities do you think distinguish your best performers?

Finally... Employer Comments:

Our office surveyed employers and they told us what distinguishes the most impressive candidates.

Question:

What things impressed you about the best candidates that you interviewed?

Answers included:

- Communication skills
- Strong liberal arts and general education foundation
- Knowledge of career and how their strengths and abilities will be applicable
- Students who have learned a great deal about enterprise on their own
- Genuine
- Preparedness for interview
- Maturity
- Common Sense
- Positive attitudes and realistic expectations
- Bearing and confidence

Consider the list above. Having considered how your qualifications fit the employer's needs, having developed CAR stories that prove by example and having done your research on the company and the position, are you ready to stand out from the crowd?