

# Perfecting the Interview

Read through this packet and learn how to prepare for your interview. Don't forget that career counselors are happy to meet with you to conduct a **mock interview** – *the opportunity to put your interviewing skills into practice!*



*The Questions • Your Interview Questions • Expectations & Preparations • Attire • Etiquette & Image • Types of Interviews • After the Interview*

## The Questions

### For all questions, keep these tips in mind:

- Think before answering each question
- Accentuate the positive; put a positive spin on the negative
- Keep your replies short, and focused on the question; don't ramble or go off on tangents
- Use professional language, no slang, obscenities or fillers ('like', 'um')
- Feel free to ask for clarification if you are confused by a question
- If stumped, say "that's a good question, let me think about that for a moment," stay calm, collect your thoughts, and answer.
- Use the interview to evaluate the company; ask good questions
- Do not discuss personal information such as marital status, children, religious background, political affiliation

### In any interview, the candidate is being assessed in 3 areas:

*Can you do the job?*

*Will you do the job?*

*How will you fit into our organization and culture?*

## Some Common Interview Questions:

**Note:** Know your top skills and traits, especially those related to the field you are applying for. Weave them into the interview conversation naturally as opportunities arise.

### General Questions:

Tell me about yourself.

How would your current/previous supervisor describe you?

Why did you choose St. John Fisher College?

Why did you choose your major?

Why have you chosen this career path/industry?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

Why are you interested in/what do you know about our company?

Tell me about your experience at XYZ?  
What qualifications do you have that would make you successful here?  
What can you offer us that other candidates cannot?  
What are your top strengths?  
What are your weaknesses or in what area would you like to grow?  
In your last position, what were the things you liked most? The least?  
What are your salary expectations?  
What type of person/situation frustrates you the most?  
What characteristics do you look for in a work environment?  
What motivates you to excel?  
What are some accomplishments you are most proud of? And why?  
Are there any questions that you wished I had asked you but didn't?  
Do you have any questions for us?

## Behavioral Questions:

Tell me about a situation where you worked under pressure or met tight deadlines.  
Give an example of yourself in a leadership role.  
Tell me about a challenging situation and how you handled it.  
Give one or two examples of your creativity.  
How do you handle conflict? Give an example.  
Describe a time when your workload has overwhelming and how you dealt with it.  
What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?  
What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?  
Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team.  
If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?  
Tell me about a time you missed a deadline and why?

## Challenge → Action → Result (The “CAR” method):

Use this strategy to develop behavioral examples that you can use while responding to interview questions.

**Challenge:** Describe the circumstance or *challenge* you faced. Give specific details about what you were trying to achieve, some issues that arose, and context to help the listener understand the situation.

*(ex. Two days before a group project was due a member became very ill and did not complete his/her portion of the assignment.)*

**Action:** What *action* did you take to address the situation? Did you work as part of a team? If so, how did you contribute? What actions did the team take as a whole?

*(ex. I coordinated a Skype meeting with group members to obtain and incorporate the needed information.)*

**Result:** Talk about the goal that you achieved, problem that you resolved, or any other *results* of your efforts.

*(ex. We completed the assignment within the time-frame and received positive feedback and a satisfactory grade.)*

# Your Interview Questions

Don't forget – the interview is the opportunity for you to see if the organization is the right fit for you. Be prepared with questions. Here are a few starters (but be sure to add questions unique to the position):

- What are the skills and attributes that would make someone successful in this position?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in this position? The typical client or customer I would be dealing with?
- What are the most immediate challenges of the position that need to be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- How will I be evaluated at XYZ company and how often?
- What are the career paths in this department? Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- What is the most exciting change you've seen in this company since you've worked here?
- What are the next steps in the interview process?

## Expectations & Preparations

Most professionals involved in the hiring process have high expectations that you, as the candidate, are expected to fulfill.

### Expectations of the Recruiter

- You will dress professionally
- You will be on time (scope out the location the day before)
- You have a good, *firm* handshake
- You will have good eye contact
- You will be familiar with and interested in the company
- You will be polite at all times (even when asked repetitious questions) and act professionally
- You will treat all clerical people with respect



In order to distinguish yourself from your competition and help you determine if a company fits with your plans, pre-interview research is essential.



### A Well-Prepared Candidate Should Know:

- The product the business makes or services it provides
- The scope of the business, number of employees and locations
- The target market or clientele
- Key business issues - opportunities and challenges
- Publicly announced plans for the next 1 to 5 years
- Staffing needs
- How the company fits your objectives

# Attire

In any interview, you should be presenting yourself in a professional manner.

## To be successful, keep these attire tips in mind:

Always get the best interview outfit you can afford

Leave off the perfume and aftershave; many people have sensitivities to scent

Wear your interview outfit at least twice in advance of any interview

Travel as lightly as possible; try not to juggle an umbrella, hat, scarf, earmuffs, gloves, purse, overcoat and boots

### Women's Dress for Success should follow:

- A conservative pant or skirt suit
- Conservative blouse, plain or with a discrete pattern
- Pantyhose (take an extra pair for emergencies)
- Low heeled traditional pumps
- Conservative jewelry, accessories, make-up and hairstyle



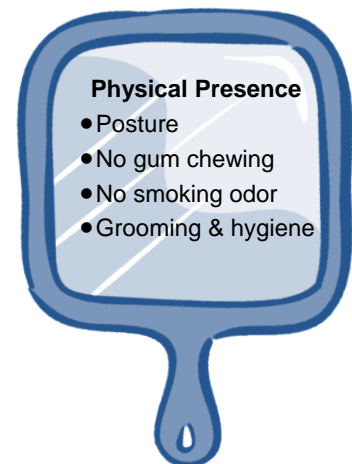
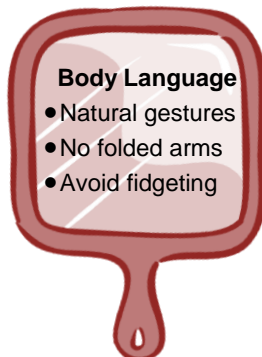
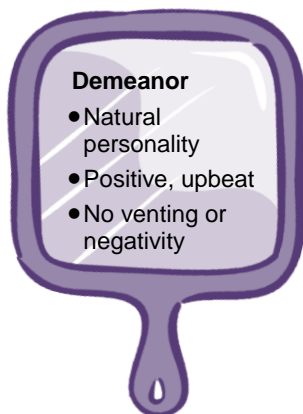
### Men's Dress for Success should follow:

- Traditional men's suit for most professional positions OR a very nice sport coat and high quality slacks for less corporate environments
- High quality dress shirt, white or light blue
- Nice tie, nothing too loud or with logos
- Good leather belt to match shoes
- Polished conservative dress shoes; conservative **dark** socks
- Fresh shave and haircut
- Remove any earrings; minimal jewelry
- No hats ever

# Etiquette & Image



You will have only one opportunity to make a first impression with each interviewer, so be sure to manage your image by keeping these in mind:



# Types of Interviews

## Screening Interviews

- May be conducted by search firm professionals or an internal Human Resources recruiter.
- Are used to evaluate a base level of technical competence and emphasize fit and potential in their questioning.
- Often these are conducted by phone. Keep a copy of your resume nearby for reference.

## Presentation Interviews

- Used especially for positions where presentation skills are essential.
- Make sure you have complete information to target your presentation effectively: target audience, length of time expected, presentation topic and available equipment for PowerPoint presentations, overheads, flipcharts, etc.

## Multiple Round Interviews

- Series of interviews scheduled over a period of several days or on one day - one interview after the other.
- Consider each person you are meeting with as important and recognize that there may be repetition in the questions they are asking.

## Behaviorally Based Interviews

- Situational interviews that are targeted to obtain specific information from you about challenges or events from your past.
- You'll be asked to describe your behavior, including details about the skills you have utilized and the abilities you've demonstrated.
- Use examples providing as many details as possible and take time to think through your answers.
- "Tell me about a time when..."

## Panel Interviews

- Usually conducted by 3 to 5 people in the same room at the same time.
- Often arranged at a table across from you.
- Answer each question asked and make eye contact with the person asking the questions first, then scan the room as you answer.

## Final Round Interviews

- Conducted with manager after the others are completed.
- The top two or three candidates make it to this step.
- You may receive an offer during the interview or shortly after.

# ***After the Interview***

It is important that you send a thank you letter after each interview. Sending a thank you email may be appropriate if you have communicated via email prior to the interview, the interviewer welcomes you to follow up via email, or the interviewer gives you his or her business card with the email address on it.

The letter should be short (1/2 page), sent out within **24 to 48 hours** after the interview and should be personalized to each separate interviewer you met with.



- Include a reminder of who you are - maybe something unique about you and/or an interesting topic that came up at the interview.
- Reiterate your interest in the position and mention specific aspects of the interview and position that may have reinforced this for you.
- Provide follow-up and/or clarification for a question or two that you feel you need to expand on or correct.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and express that you look forward to hearing back from them.

**We wish you great success at your interview!**

*For more information and/or to meet with a career counselor please contact the Career Center:*



**Email:** [career@sjfc.edu](mailto:career@sjfc.edu)

**Phone:** (585) 385-8050

**Location:** Lavery Library Ground Floor, Room 104