

The Application

At some stage in the interview process, you may be asked to fill out the company's standard job application. Even though you have provided your resume, complete the application. Unless instructed to do so, do not write on the application "See Resume." Answer all information requested. False or incomplete information could ruin your chance of an offer or could be grounds for termination at a later time.

When an employer wants to extend a job offer, the company's personnel/human resources department will conduct a background check. They will contact your references, schools, former employers and the military to verify information on your resume and job application.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

EDUCATION

DO NOT exaggerate educational accomplishments. DO NOT inflate your GPA. Educational references and information are checked thoroughly.

NO WORK HISTORY

There are over a million people looking for their first job, so don't panic. Be sure to list any volunteer or community service work, leadership positions in student organizations, as well as any self-employment work, such as consulting.

REFERENCES

Potential employers will contact your references. Be sure to talk with each of your references to inform them of the positions for which you are applying, so that they are prepared to give a good and thoughtful recommendation. Always ask permission to list them as references.

POOR REFERENCE

If you know that your current or former supervisor/manager will not give you a strong reference, list another previous supervisor's name on the job application. Remember to get permission.

UNEMPLOYMENT GAPS

You should offer some type of explanation if you have gaps of unemployment between jobs. "Job-hunting" is a legitimate reason, as is education.

TERMINATION

DO NOT omit this information from your application. It will leave a noticeable gap in your employment history. During the interview you can briefly explain the circumstances.

LAY-OFF

If you were "down-sized", "rightsized" or laid off due to a merger or any other reason beyond your control, don't be embarrassed. There are thousands of people in the same situation. Fill-in the appropriate section of the application and give the reason for the lay-off.

COMPENSATION (OR SALARY)

When the application asks what wage or salary you expect, write "Open." If you specify a dollar amount, you may price yourself out of the job or be underpaid.

If you find any of the following on your application, ignore them:

- Marital Status
- Arrests (but you must list convictions, if asked)
- Height, weight
- Age, sex
- Religion, politics
- Military discharge
- Disability
- Race or national origin
- Birthplace
- Size of your family

Note: As with all laws and rules, there are exceptions.

TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATION

Some employers require on-line applications. Be careful when completing these to check for accuracy before submitting and print a copy for your records if possible.

CHECKLIST

- Print, don't write.
- Use a pen, not a pencil.
- Neatness counts.
- Answer every question. If a question doesn't apply to you write NA (Not Applicable).
- Don't give an expected salary.
- Be accurate.
- Make sure your reason for leaving each job is objective, not subjective.
- Make sure you have permission from all your references.
- Be honest.
- Don't forget to sign and date the application.

The Interview

WHAT TO EXPECT

Interviews are usually very predictable. Many interviewers are just as nervous or uncomfortable as the interviewee. The first step in preparing for an interview is understanding the company's purpose for meeting with you. There are many reasons why a company likes to meet face-to-face with its applicants:

- Companies are looking for people who can communicate.
- The employer wants to find out how you think and process, both critically and analytically.
- An employer wants to know how knowledgeable and experienced you are.
- The interview is a prospective employer's opportunity to make sure that the "personality" of the company and that of the individual are compatible.
- The interviewer wants to be sure that the candidate has an interest in the job.
- The interviewer wants to be sure that the candidate can do the job.
- The interviewer wants to be sure that the candidate will do the job.

INTERVIEW TYPES

The interview should be a two-way conversational exchange to obtain enough information to make an employment decision. It is a conversation intended to help both parties learn as much as possible about each other within a limited amount of time. Before preparing for the interview, however, it is helpful to be aware of the various types of interviews.

THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that your past behavior is the best predictor of your future behavior. In essence, if you are asked behavioral-oriented questions, you're no longer asking questions that are hypothetical, but are now asking questions that must be answered based upon fact.

With a behavioral question, the interviewer is looking for results. They are not just looking for an activity list. So they are listening for things like names, dates, places, the outcome and especially what the individual's role was in achieving the outcome.

Candidates can prepare for behavioral interviews by identifying specific examples for each of these probes: Assertiveness, Clarification, Initiative, Commitment to Task, Dealing with Ambiguity, Decision Making, Interaction, Leadership, Management Skills, Communication Skills, Analytical Skills, Organizational Skills, Problem Solving, and Team Building.

Prepare short descriptions of each situation by using the STAR method.

SITUATION TASK ACTION RESULTS

You should spend approximately 25% of your answer on Situation and Task, 50% on your actions and thought processes and 25% on results or the outcome. Be ready to give details if asked.

When preparing, identify an unsuccessful example for each probe because you will probably be asked to give an example of a time when things didn't work out as planned. One way to end an answer to a negative probe is to say something like, "the mistake caused me to delay the project, but it helped me to develop a project tracking system which would minimize the chance of that happening again." Remember, mistakes are what help us learn.

THE SCREENING INTERVIEW

The screening or preliminary interview's purpose is to assess the skills and personality traits of the potential candidate. The intent is to determine whether those skills and traits meet the criteria for the position. It is a broad-based meeting, generally conducted by a human resources department representative. The objective is to "screen-out" those applicants who do not fit, and "screen-in" those who are judged appropriate to move on to the next level of interview. Your purpose is to convince the interviewer that you have what the company wants.

THE GENERAL OR STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The next step is often the general or structured interview, although in the interest of time, this interview may be combined with the screening interview. The general interview is a one-to-one discussion that aims to determine whether your being hired is in the best interest of both parties. Be ready to talk about specifics of the position, company and industry and how your skills and experience fit the position/company.

THE CASE INTERVIEW

This is a problem-solving or case scenario that tests your investigative, analytical and integrative skills. Typically used by management consulting firms and investment banking firms, but also used by other organizations.

The Career Services Center has books in the Career Library and Vault Guide online that will help prepare for case interviews. Many firms have interactive cases on their company's website. A good way to practice!

The Interview

THE MEAL INTERVIEW

The social interview can take place in a variety of non-traditional settings (lunch, cocktail party, company tour). More often than not, it will not resemble an interview in the true sense. It generally provides the employer with a good indication of how you might fit into the organization. The atmosphere may be highly informal, but the objective is the same. When ordering food or drink, follow the lead of the employer host. Do not order the most expensive item on the menu but settle for something more moderately priced.

THE SEQUENTIAL INTERVIEW

Some companies use a series of interviews to evaluate candidates. Interviewers may include several supervisors, managers and/or peers. Each person may cover the same material, or each may focus on a particular aspect of your qualifications. In either case, treat each interview as your first.

CHECKLIST

- Be prepared. Do your homework/research on the company, position and the industry.
- Check for a company website.
- Dress appropriately. Dress for the job. No open-toed shoes!
- Arrive early (15 minutes before the interview time).
- Get good directions. Know where to park, and how long it will take you to get there.
- Be prepared to fill out an application. Do not write "See Resume" on the application.
- Always extend your hand in greeting. Firm grasp, not limp.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Know why you want the job.
- Let the interviewer know your qualifications for the position.
- Do not take notes unless you have asked to do so.
- Take your cues from the questions and responses provided by the interviewer.
- Watch your body language.
- Watch the interviewer's body language.
- Take extra copies of your resume.
- Ask for the job.
- Always request a business card.
- Follow-up with a thank you letter.

THE GROUP OR PANEL INTERVIEW

This is an interview that involves you and two or more interviewers. This technique is often used to make a more efficient use of interviewing time and to determine your ability to work cohesively within a group (not to mention your ability to withstand pressure).

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Do your homework. Be able to provide answers for both yourself and the potential employer. Assess what you have to offer and be prepared to present information in a convincing manner. There are four stages of interview preparation:

1. Researching the company
2. Presenting yourself to the employer
3. Learning to answer the questions
4. Learning to ask the questions

RESEARCHING THE COMPANY

The interview process starts long before you actually meet an interviewer. First you must thoroughly research the employer. This will impress the person with whom you meet because it demonstrates that you have taken an interest in the organization. The more informed you are, the more focused the interview.

While there are traditional methods of conducting company research such as reading company literature and brochures, students should also take advantage of the following:

- Contact alumni within the organization.
- Talk with students who may have had an internship with the company.
- Discuss the employer with your Career Services professional.
- Visit the company's website.
- Conduct extensive company research on the Internet.
- Arrange a mock interview with the Career Center.

PRESENTING YOURSELF TO THE EMPLOYER

You should be able to tell the employer enough about yourself to give a good picture of what kind of person you are. You should be able to explain your relevant skills and capabilities.

- Identify the required skills for the job and the company. Do you have those skills?
- What differentiates you from other applicants?
- Why would you want this job?
- Why do you want to work for this company or organization?
- How did you arrive at your decision to interview and pursue this company/organization?

The Interview

LEARNING TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Every interviewer has a different style of interviewing. For this reason, you shouldn't try to memorize or rehearse the questions or your answers. Preparing for common categories of questions, however, will help ensure that you are not caught off-guard when a particular question is asked. Your goal is to be natural and impress the interviewer with your preparation and presentation.

- Before answering, determine what information the interviewer is trying to obtain. If the question is unclear, ask the interviewer to rephrase or clarify it.
- Convey your strengths.
- Relate your work experience, education, training and personal strengths to the position for which you are interviewing.
- Anticipate how to handle negative information.
- Stress what you can bring to the position/company.

Videotaping and mock interviews can be arranged at the Career Services Center.

QUESTIONS-QUESTIONS-QUESTIONS

These are typical questions a prospective employer may ask during the interview:

1. What would you like to tell me about yourself?
2. What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
3. What is the most difficult situation you have ever faced? How did you deal with it?
4. What accomplishment has given you the most satisfaction? Why?
5. What are your short-term career goals? Long-term?
6. What has been your most rewarding college experience?
7. Why did you choose to attend CMC?
8. What college subjects do you enjoy most? Why?
9. Do you think your grades are a good indicator of your academic capabilities?
10. What are your extracurricular activities?
11. How has your college experience prepared you for a professional career?
12. What criteria are you using to evaluate the companies with which you are interviewing?
13. What do you know about our company?
14. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
15. What kinds of rewards are most satisfying to you?
16. What is your typical role as a group member?

17. What special characteristics or specific skills will you bring to this company?
18. What are your long-range career plans?
19. Why do you want this position?

THE NON-QUESTION INFORMATION PROBE

Often, the interviewer does not ask a direct question, but instead presents a case study or hypothetical situation.

Some examples:

- Describe yourself as a team player.
- Give an example of how you handled a difficult situation.
- Think of a crisis situation, during which things got out of control. Why did it happen? What role did you play?
- If you had your life to live over again, what would you do differently?
- Of all the jobs which you've held, which did you enjoy most? Least?
- Give an example of when you've gone the extra mile.
- If you had the chance to repeat your college career, what would you do differently?

ASKING SOME QUESTIONS OF YOUR OWN

Always prepare a few informed and relevant questions of your own. If you have no questions, the interviewer may assume that you have no interest in the job or company.

1. What makes your company different from others?
2. How long have you worked with this organization? What do you like the most?
3. How does the job for which I'm interviewing fit in with the mission of the company?
4. What are the core values of the company?
5. What are the strategic issues within the company?
6. What is the short and long-term strategic direction of the company?
7. Who is your major competitor? Why?

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Do not ask questions regarding what the organization can do for you such as salary, benefits, vacation time, graduate school financial aid, and so forth. These types of questions can be asked once they have offered you the job and you can negotiate them before you decide to accept or decline the offer.