



# SouthHills

School of Business & Technology



TEACHING PEOPLE, CHANGING LIVES SINCE 1970

State College | Altoona | Lewistown | Philipsburg

[www.southhills.edu](http://www.southhills.edu)

Call Toll Free (888) 282-7427

# Interviewing Techniques

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The interview is essential to getting a job. Few people are hired without a face-to-face interview, making it the most important part of your job search.

## Interview Essentials

- Make a positive impression
- Communicate your skills
- Anticipate and answer problem questions
- Be able to answer “why should I hire you?”
- Follow up

## Seven Phases of an Interview

### 1 - Before the Interview

- **Don't be late!** Arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Final grooming – arrive early enough to visit the restroom and correct any grooming problems
- The receptionist – be pleasant and respectful. Assume that anything you say or do will get back to the interviewer.
- The waiting room – look and act relaxed. Study your notes or read a magazine

### 2 - First Impression

Appearance – 40% of job seekers remain unemployed because of appearance. Here are some tips to help you get ready for the big day:

- Dressing Tips
  - Dress one step above what you would actually wear on the job
  - Dress conservatively
  - Clothing should be pressed and clean
  - Wear freshly laundered/dry cleaned clothing
  - Polish your shoes
  - Wear jewelry/accessories in moderation



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- Grooming Tips
  - Trim your fingernails (males and females)
  - Women – use conservative color nail polish like pinks and neutrals
  - Women – use natural looking make-up
  - Use perfume/cologne sparingly
  - Shower before the interview
  - Use deodorant
- Hair Tips
  - Trim, clean, comb, and neatly style your hair
  - Men – trim mustaches and beards
- Oral Hygiene – brush teeth (make an appointment for a dental cleaning, if possible) and have fresh breath
- Behavior – Express confidence and energy
- Handshake
  - Should be firm
  - Avoid the “dead fish” and the “bone crusher” shake
- Eye Contact
  - Maintain good eye contact
  - Avoid staring, but look the interviewer in the eye
- Posture
  - Stand and sit with good posture
  - Do not sit until you are asked
- Mannerisms
  - Avoid distracting mannerisms – playing with hair, etc.
- Food/Gum/Smoking
  - Do not eat, drink, or chew gum during the interview
  - Do not smoke before the interview
- Speech – Employers want individuals who have good verbal skills
  - Avoid repetitive words or phrases
  - Use correct grammar
  - Speak in complete logical sentences
- Interview Relationship
  - Establish a relationship with the interviewer
  - Learn and use the interviewer’s name
  - Play the “chit-chat” game
  - Comment on something personal in the office



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### 3 – The Interview Itself

#### General Information

- If you have created a good first impression, the interviewer will be interested in finding out if you are right for the job.
- This is your chance to communicate to the interviewer that you possess the skills needed to do the job well.
- There is a time to **speak** – talk about your skills and be prepared to give examples of your skills.
- There is a time to **listen** – listen carefully to what is being said to you so you will know how to answer the questions.
- Keep personal/financial problems out of the interview.
- Take notes on important points.
- Greet and thank the receptionist on your way in and out
- Do not apologize about your background or experience
- **Do not criticize past co-workers/supervisors/companies** (and yes, that would include schools/instructors too!)

#### Ten Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions

- “Tell me about yourself”
  - Clarify if the interviewer wants to know about your work or education background.
  - Relate your background to the job for which you are applying.
  - This is an opportunity to present your key qualities and skills.
  - Sell yourself!
- “Why should I hire you?”
  - Explain what they will gain by hiring you
  - This is an opportunity to present your key qualities and skills.
  - Discuss your skills and that you won’t have to be trained in relevant areas.
  - Show how you can save time, make money and build good customer relations.
- “What are your major strengths?”
  - Give examples of skills most relevant to the job for which you are applying.
- “What are your major weaknesses?”
  - Give an honest, undamaging response followed by a positive counter statement.
  - Mention that you are aware of the weakness and that you are working on correcting it



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- “What salary do you expect?”
  - Avoid this trap!!!
  - Respond with the following:
    - What is the salary range for this type of position?
    - I am very interested in this position and my salary is negotiable.
    - What salary range do you have in mind?
  - If you are pressed for an answer, never give a single figure; always give a salary range and that you are willing to negotiate.
  - In the first interview, do not ask about the salary yourself.
- “How does your previous experience relate to this job?”
  - Emphasize your education and the skills you learned that are relevant to the job.
  - Give examples of your skills from a previous job that are transferable to the job for which you are interviewing.
- “What are your plans for the future?”
  - This explores your motives for working. Will you stay on this job and work hard or are you planning on leaving?
  - The employer wants to know:
    - Will the salary satisfy you?
    - Will you leave to raise a family?
  - Do you have a history of leaving jobs after a short period of time?
  - Are you a temporary resident?
  - Are you overqualified?
- “What will your former employers (co-workers, references) say about you?”
  - The employer is trying to see about your adaptive skills
  - What you say may be checked against what your former employer may say, so **BE HONEST!**
  - This is an opportunity to sell your skills.
- “Why are you looking for this sort of position and why here?”
  - The employer is trying to see if you want this job or just any job.
  - A person will work harder and be more productive if they really want the job, and the employer knows this!
  - Let the employer know that this is the job you really want.



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- “Tell me about your personal situation.”
  - The employer is trying to find out if you are stable and dependable.
  - Your message should be clear – your personal situation will not hurt your ability to work.
  - This includes:
    - Young children at home – “I have good, dependable child care.”
    - Single head of household – “A steady income is necessary.”
    - Young and single – “I can devote full attention to a career.”
    - Just moved here – “I have decided to stay here permanently.”
    - Leisure time – “I spend spare time hiking (or some socially acceptable behavior).”

#### *4 – Closing the Interview*

- Do not stay too long.
- Summarize your key points.
- Review your strengths.
- Thank the interviewer by name.
- Express your interest in the job.
- Arrange a reason and time to call back.
- Don’t forget to say good-bye.

#### *5 – Follow Up*

- Make notes on the interview.
- Type and send a thank-you letter.
- Address the thank-you letter to the main interviewer.
- Whenever possible, mention the names of the people you met in the interview.
- Keep it short – less than 1 page.
- Mail the letter within 24 hours of the interview.
- If you don’t hear anything after 5 days, call the interviewer:
  - “Have you made a decision?”
  - “Looking forward to the next interview.”
  - “What do I have to do to get the job?”
  - Reiterate your skills.



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## 6 – Negotiating for Salary and Benefits

The only time to negotiate is after you've been offered the job. Know the average pay range for the job. If asked for a salary dollar amount, speak in terms of a salary range.

Areas that may be negotiated:

- Salary
- Job title
- Performance review with raise attached
- Advancement
- Benefits
- Working conditions
- Vacation days
- Parking fees
- Hours

## 7 – Making a Final Decision

- The perfect job is rare and often a compromise.
- Don't accept the position on the spot – ask for 24 hours to consider it.
- Weigh the pros and cons of the job.

## Common Interview Questions

- Work Experience
  - Describe your duties and responsibilities
  - What did you enjoy about your work?
  - What did you like least about your work?
  - What would you consider your greatest accomplishment?
  - How did your job change after you were hired?
  - What was your reason for leaving?
  - How did you get along with your supervisor/coworkers?
  - For what things did your supervisor compliment you?
  - For what things did your supervisor criticize you?
  - How would your employer describe you?
  - How did you solve problems at work?
  - How did you handle conflicts between you and your supervisor/co-workers?



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- What is your impression of your former supervisor/company?
- How long have you been looking for employment?
- Do you like to work independently or in teams?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Education
  - What made you decide to attend South Hills?
  - How did you choose your major?
  - What was your greatest academic achievement?
  - Did you participate in extracurricular activities at school?
  - What was your favorite class?
  - What was your least favorite class?
  - Do your grades accurately reflect your achievement at school?
- Personal Factors
  - How would you describe yourself?
  - What are your strengths/outstanding qualities?
  - What are your weaknesses/shortcomings?
  - What qualities do you like in a supervisor?
  - What are your short/long term goals?
  - What position do you want to hold in 5 years? 10 years?
  - How do you think you can make the biggest contribution at work?
- Home Environment
  - Can you tell me about your childhood and home upbringing?
  - What are your hobbies/recreational/leisure-time interests?
  - Do you belong to any social, civic or professional clubs?
  - If you had more time, are there any activities in which you'd like to participate?
  - Are there other aspects of your qualifications which we haven't covered?
- Stress Questions
  - What do you know about our company?
  - Why did you leave your last job?
  - Don't you think that, with your background, you are overqualified for this position?
  - Why should we hire you? Your past job experience isn't useful for this job.
  - What are three of your strong points?
  - What are three of your weak points?
  - What kind of salary are you seeking?
  - What is your philosophy of life?
  - Don't you feel that you're a little too old/young for this job?



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- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What motivates you?
- How did you prepare for this interview?
- What's more important to you: your salary or your job?
- What is your definition of success?

## Questions You May Want to Ask the Interviewer

- What would an average day on the job entail?
- What would my most important responsibility be?
- What kind of training and staff development programs do you offer?
- How will my performance be evaluated? How often?
- How would you describe the most successful employees in your company?
- What are the short/long term strategic directions of the company?
- What are the goals of the department for the next year?
- What particular areas of this job have people had difficulty with in the past?
- How does the company keep pace with current technological advances?
- How soon can I expect to hear from you?



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## Interview Day Checklist

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- I have done the necessary research on the company.
- I have prepared a list of appropriate questions for the interviewer.
- I have a list of references ready should they be requested.
- I have the necessary tools to correctly and neatly complete an application if I am asked to fill one out.
- Completed Application Form (if given one ahead of the interview)
- I have reviewed my skill cards and am prepared to sell myself to get the job.
- My hair is cut, washed, combed, and styled in a professional manner.
- I have bathed and used deodorant.
- My makeup, jewelry, and perfume/after-shave are not excessive.
- My fingernails are trimmed, clean, and have been freshly done (if polished).
- My teeth are clean and I have used mouthwash for fresh breath.
- My shoes are clean, neat, and scuffed-free.
- My clothes are clean, pressed, and styled appropriately for the job for which I am interviewing.
- I have packed in a briefcase (or other professional style bag) any of the following items I may need:
  - 2 Pens
  - 1 Pencil
  - Tablet
  - Portfolio with the following items:
    - Examples of Past Work
    - Extra Resumes (at least 5 copies – in the event you interview in front of a panel)
    - References (at least 5 copies)
    - Transcripts (at least 5 copies)
    - Skill Cards