



You've submitted a great application for the position and reviewing that has made the employer want to get to know you in person. Depending upon the job, the employer, the location, and the timeframe, you will be asked to interview in some way. Basically, the employer will have already decided that you *appear* to have the qualifications they are seeking (the level of education, experience, or skill set), and you *appear* to have a genuine interest in the position. The way you appear on paper, however, may not bear out when they meet you in person, hence the need to interact with you to learn more about you.

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

The Latin roots of the word interview essentially mean 'to look at each other' and that is just what an interview is: a chance for the interviewer to "look" at you more carefully as a candidate and for you, the candidate, to look closely at the employer. The employer wants to know three things about you:

- 1) Are you qualified for the position? You appear to be qualified from the application materials, but a conversation allows more in-depth probing about your skills and experiences.
- 2) Are you seriously interested in the kind of work this job involves? Besides saying you are interested, do you seem sincere? Can you express that interest through talking about your prior experiences?
- 3) Will you "fit in" with the company culture, the department where you'll be working, the clients or customers, and your peers in other parts of the company?

You, as a candidate, are wondering a few things too:

- 1) Can I do this job? Hearing more about the details, the training, and the other people involved can clarify whether the job is one you can do well and like.
- 2) Does this job sound or look like the one you thought you were applying to?
- 3) Will you "fit in" with the company culture, the department where you'll be working, the clients or customers, and your peers in other parts of the company?

WHAT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS WILL YOU ENCOUNTER?

Interviews come in all shapes and sizes, but college students are most likely to encounter a couple of formats.

-- **Screening Interviews:** if you participate in interviews through Career Services, either on-campus or at another location (i.e. Bowdoin, Bates, or our Boston and New York programs), you will likely be scheduled for a half-hour interview that is usually a tool for the employer to determine who they may want to invite for an on-site in-depth interview. You will submit your applications through Career Services and be notified through our eRecruiting system if you are selected for one of these interviews. Typically, you will be one of 12-14 candidates being interviewed in one day. The employer may be able to "invite back" as many of those candidates as they wish or they may be limited to selecting one or two out of the day's interviews. This type of interview does not usually result in a job offer on the spot – follow-up interviews are most often the next step. Only a few career fields employ this type of interview – more often, employers begin with the in-depth interview.

-- **In-Depth Interviews:** takes place, usually, at the employer's site. If it is a first interview, it will be your responsibility to get to and from the interview and cover your travel costs. If it is a second (or third) interview, following up on a screening interview, it is possible that travel arrangements and costs will be taken care of by the employer. In-depth interviews may be highly structured, involve meeting with other employees (essentially several interviews in a row), and will possibly include a tour of the organization. Sometimes it also includes more "informal" activities such as a meal. And, it may include an activity designed to allow you to demonstrate your skills.

-- **Group Interviews:** often with a group of 3 or more, especially if a search "committee" is involved in the hiring. A group interview is no different from an individual interview except that you have to remember to include eye contact and interaction with all members of the group throughout the conversation – don't appear to leave anyone out. A group interview may be one of several interview conducted as part of an in-depth interview.

-- **Phone Interviews:** a phone interview may be brief or may be a protracted phone conversation with one or more people at the hiring organization. This may be a prelude to an on-site interview, it may be a way of further narrowing down a pool of candidates, or it may even be the conversation that cinches the offer (particularly in the case of a summer job or internship). You should not take this opportunity lightly and should prepare as carefully as you would for a screening interview.

-- **Case Study Interviews:** most often used in conjunction with in-depth interviews in the consulting field. The interviewer poses a situation/case and asks you to think through it out loud. There is no one answer they are looking for you to find, but they do want to get a sense of your thought process and the resources you might be

aware of for addressing the case. Career Services offers books on preparing for case interviews, you can download Vault.com's guide to case interviews via the Career Services link to their resources, and Colby alumni have offered to work with students in preparation for these interviews. Ask Career Services for help learning more about how to prepare for case interviews.

HOW TO PREPARE

Learn as much about the employer as possible. The interviewer will not be impressed if they have to use the interview time to give you a personal crash-course on their business. Look carefully at the employer's website. Use library resources (ask a reference librarian for help) to find out what has been reported in both popular and specialized media about the organization. Find industry publications and scan them to learn about issues of interest to people in the field. Check the Colby Alumni Directory to see if there are alums working there whom you might call or e-mail for advice and background information. (If, after these attempts, you still know very little about the organization, you can still gain points by describing to the interviewer the attempt you made!)

Practice your interview skills. Attend an Introduction to Interviewing Skills workshop offered by Career Services. Make an appointment with a Career Services staff member to talk about how to prepare for your interviews. Networking, where you are the person asking the questions, is actually good practice. Schedule a "Mock Interview" with a Career Services staff member for a videotaped practice session (this is particularly valuable when done not too long before you have a real interview scheduled). Interviewing well is a skill that not everyone is comfortable with – comfort comes with practice and confidence that you can and want to do the job you're being interviewed for.

Prepare questions that you will ask. Many of your questions may be answered before you can ask them, but it helps to go to the interview prepared with questions that you would like to ask. They should not be questions that would have been answered in readily available literature or on the employer's web site.

- Where does this job fit into the organizational structure?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What will be my opportunities for advancement?

Do not ask about salary or benefits until you are reasonably sure you will be offered the job.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS/ ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

There are a number of "typical" interview questions that you can anticipate. Considering what you would like to say in a non-stressful setting will make you more confident when the question is later asked by an interviewer. Keep in mind that your answers should be related to the job or career for which you are being considered, that you should be positive in describing past experiences, and that you should be able to back up any statements you make about yourself with appropriate examples. A list of "50 Typical Interview Questions" is available in the Career Services Office.

As you practice answering interview questions, try to think about one or two points you would want to touch upon if asked each question. This may help you avoid "over-practicing" so that your answers will always sound fresh.

Remember that there is often no "right" answer to most questions asked in an interview. The person with whom you are speaking wants to become better acquainted with you and it is to your distinct advantage to respond with answers that reflect positively on your education, experience, personality, and your consequent ability to communicate intelligently.

Illegal questions: Questions concerning your personal life (age, weight, sexual orientation, marital status, family planning or child care arrangements, home ownership, etc.) are illegal unless it can be shown that they relate to specific job requirements. While such questions should not be asked, they sometimes are, and it is best to have a strategy planned for dealing with them. The best advice is to use your judgment. If an illegal question is asked that does not particularly bother you, volunteer enough data to satisfy the interviewer.

If an illegal question is asked that you don't wish to answer, try to determine what really concerns the interviewer and deal with that issue. For example, if the interviewer asked if you are planning to have children, he/she probably wants to know if you are committed to a career. You can answer the question by reiterating your seriousness in pursuing a career and stressing that any childbearing plans will not interfere with that goal. If the interviewer keeps pushing for more personal information, this may be a sign that this may not be a place where you would want to work. If you feel strongly that a question is inappropriate, you may simply state your objection, but remember that you may well be jeopardizing your chances for the job.

If you are asked illegal questions during an on-campus or Colby-affiliated program, please make someone in Career Services aware of the situation as quickly as possible. Staff members are also available to help you when you have encountered illegal questions or other questionable interviewing practices apart from Colby-sponsored interviews.

IF THINGS DON'T GO WELL

Sometimes interviewers are ineffectual and fail to ask questions that give candidates the opportunity to communicate their skills, achievements, and potential. If you find yourself in this situation you should be prepared to assume the responsibility for providing the information which the unskilled interviewer has not solicited. A formula described by Donald Teff (in a National Business Employment Weekly article) suggests that a candidate should respond to any question posed by the interviewer, but then expand on the answer by introducing a new thought, asking another question, or providing groundwork for further discussion of the candidate's abilities or background. This formula may also be used in a more effective interview situation or anytime the candidate wishes to seize an opportunity to expand the information solicited.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Look professional. First impressions will not get you a job, but it can lose it for you. Men should wear suits, ties, polished shoes, and dark socks. Women should wear tailored dresses or suits, stockings, and conservative (closed-toe) shoes. **NEVER, EVER assume that casual clothes will be appropriate.** Consult with someone in Career Services if you have interview clothing questions.
- Be punctual. Never break an appointment. In the case of a real emergency, call the employer to explain.
- Have a strong (but not bone-breaking) handshake. Look people in the eye.
- Never chew gum. Don't smoke, unless invited to do so, and then only if the interviewer is also smoking. The same goes for alcoholic beverages in a social hour or meal situation.
- Don't schedule interviews back-to-back if you can help it. Be prepared to lengthen the interview process if the employer asks you to meet someone else.
- Emphasize the positive. While past failures and shortcomings need not be volunteered, don't try to cover them up or sidestep them. Should recruiters ask about your failures, try to explain the circumstances, rather than blame others or make excuses. A Career Services staff member can help you practice answers to questions you are nervous about answering.
- Relax. An interview can be a pleasant experience if you're prepared. Remember, however, that the interview may still be in progress when you are having lunch, drinking a cocktail, or merely chatting with an employee. Such "relaxed" situations can influence decisions.

FOLLOW-UP

Always write a follow-up/thank-you letter after an interview – either on paper or via e-mail. Whether it was an informational interview or an actual job interview, the follow-up letter is an essential part of the process. While it appears on the surface merely to express your appreciation for the opportunity to talk with the interviewer, it also serves to remind the interviewer of your qualifications and interest in the job or career field. Finally, and not incidentally, it leaves a very favorable impression and could be the one factor that really makes you stand out from the crowd.