

## **Interviewing**

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When interviewing for jobs, internships, fellowships, etc., the most important thing you can do is prepare. You cannot always know the specific questions you may be asked, but you can reflect upon your own experiences and how they demonstrate your qualifications for the position.

Creative people often have interviews that incorporate a portfolio review (see handout on portfolio preparation) and a discussion of your work allows you to point out how the work demonstrates your qualifications. Part of your reflection in preparation therefore necessitates putting together your interview portfolio and this in turn will spur you to think about your over all qualifications for a position.

Perhaps the most pertinent preparation, in addition to putting together your portfolio, is researching the potential employer. Read about potential employers via their web sites, find articles about the employer, investigate most recent activities. Find people who either work for the organization or are familiar with it and ask questions. LinkedIn can be a great way to find people already working for a company. By doing this research you can show that you are interested, engaged and passionate about what the employer is doing.

### **After the Preparations Are Done**

Arrive at least a few minutes early so you can collect yourself and check out the environment. By doing this, you will have more of a sense of the kind of place you may be working that simply cannot be conveyed through articles, the web, or your connections.

Successful interviews should feel more like a conversation and this starts right from the introductions. Shake hands firmly. In some cultures hand shaking is not the norm and if you are not comfortable with this ritual then you need to practice it. Be nice to the front line people (receptionists, etc.) since they may also be asked to give their impression of you.

Dress for success! Erring on the side of conservative will reinforce your professionalism. Remember, if you are wearing a jacket and it appears that the environment is more laid back you can always take a jacket off. On the other hand, if you are too dressed down a jacket will not magically appear to dress you up.

## **How Do I Answer the Questions?**

Since you cannot know in advance the questions you will be asked, you need to figure out the information you wish to convey.

Think about the qualities you have that employers have stated they are seeking. These qualities may be quite different from creative skills and may be things like:

- Working well under pressure
- Meeting deadlines
- Leadership skills
- Ability to work independently and/or in a team
- Organizational skills
- Administrative skills
- Good written and oral communication skills

In this way, you can focus your answers (regardless of question) on the things you wish to convey. Thus, if an employer should state, “Tell me about yourself,” you can focus on the things you wish to convey. On the other hand, employers may ask questions like “Tell me about a time when you failed.” This type of question is most associated with something called behavioral interviewing and is predicated on the belief that past performance is a predictor of future action. If asked a question like this, which on the surface seems to be a negative, turn it into a positive by not only describing the failure, but also what you learned from the failure and how you have, and will, implement this new knowledge.

Be yourself! If you have submitted your resume and portfolio for a position and then are asked to interview, chances are good that the employer is aware of your specific skills and believes that your skills are pertinent enough for the job and the interview becomes about goodness of fit. If you present yourself as something you are not at the interview, then the organization is not hiring who they think they are and this will be problematic in the long run since neither you, or the employer, will be happy.

Sometimes you will be asked about salary requirements in an interview. Do your best to wait on an answer to this question until you have been offered a job. Once you have been made an offer you can find information on what people are paid for certain jobs in certain regions and should visit web sites like:

Salaries.com <http://www.salaries.com>

College Grad <http://www.collegegrad.com/salary>

Monster <http://www.monster.com>

Please note that neither the University of Michigan or the School of Art and Design endorses any of these sites.

## **Your Questions**

At some point in the interview you will most likely be asked if you have any questions. Sometimes the interview goes so well that any questions you may have had are now

answered. Other times this is not the case.

Not everyone will have the same kinds of questions but your research into the company will come in handy here. You may have read about a specific project and could ask if you may be a part of it. The organization may have an international presence and you could ask about the opportunities to travel as part of your job. You may be interested in the opportunities for advancement. By asking questions you are demonstrating further interest in the organization and this is VERY important to employers.

At the end of the interview, you should ask how the employers will be following up with you and when you can expect to hear from them. Ask if it is appropriate for you to follow up with them, and how.

### **After the Interview**

Definitely follow up with a thank you. While it is certainly convenient to email your thank you, in the digital age employers may be more impressed with a hand written note since it takes the extra effort to write and send it. However you decide to send a thank you, electronically, typed, handwritten, etc., you must follow up!

Make sure to get the name and contact information of the person who interviewed you since this may not be the same person who will make hiring decisions.

Think about the interview afterward and discover what you can learn about what to do differently or more effectively for the next interview.

More information on successfully interviewing can be found on U of M's Career Center web site: <http://www.careercenter.umich.edu>

and at these web sites:

**How to Handle Your Job Interviews Successfully** <http://www.pohly.com/interview.html>  
**Acing the Interview** <http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/aceinterview.htm>

For more information about interviewing, or to discuss other issues related to career development, contact John Luther, Career Development Coordinator, by stopping at the front desk of the Smucker Wagstaff Academic Programs Center or calling to make an appointment (734) 764-0397.

## Interviewing/Presentation Checklist

The following checklist is a useful tool whether you are preparing for a formal interview or have a chance meeting in which you can network. Some categories (i.e., resume, portfolio, etc.) are only applicable to more formal interviewing. Always have business cards with you, be able to discuss your interest in your chosen field, and follow up with contacts.

\_\_\_\_\_Resume

\_\_\_\_\_Portfolio

- Relevance to organization
- Examples of process
- Ability to speak about each piece

\_\_\_\_\_Business Card or other means of contact

\_\_\_\_\_30 second self-promotion

- Background
- Interests/Activities
- Leadership/Campus Involvement
- Major/Academic Interests
- Volunteer Work
- Special Abilities/Skills
- Interesting Life Experiences
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\_\_\_\_\_Ability to explain interest in your field

\_\_\_\_\_Ability to explain interest in employer's organization (do your research!)

\_\_\_\_\_Interview "outfit"

\_\_\_\_\_STAR (able to describe Situation, Task, Action/Activity, Result)

\_\_\_\_\_Ask for contact information

\_\_\_\_\_Follow up as agreed and/or appropriate

\_\_\_\_\_Send thank you letters/notes