

Interview Tips

General Comments

Hiring employees to fill specific positions involves two basic decisions:

1. The supervisor's decision whether the individual is right for the job; and
2. The applicant's decision whether the job is right for him/her.



Research the Job

For most Federal jobs, basic qualifications are determined prior to the interview, so if you made it this far, congratulations! Now, the spotlight is on you and you must show that you are the right person for the job. Here are some hints:

1. Get to know the organization, their mission, and the job. Do some homework and learn about the organization (other than their name) and what they do. Most organization's have websites with mission statements, goals/objectives, and other helpful information.
2. Learn about the job. If you are applying as an apprentice, intern, or entry level positions, knowing what the journey or target level position is important in deciding whether this career field is right for you. Go to the library or "goggle" the career field --- learn about tools used, methods, work processes, products, etc.
3. Information about Federal positions can also be found in:
 - a. Vacancy Announcements. There is a brief description of duties and responsibilities in all vacancy announcements. It also describes education and experience requirements, as well as highly desirable skills.
 - b. Qualification Standards. They can be found at the Office of Personnel Management website: <http://www.opm.gov>.
 - c. Classification Standards. This provides information about the job and the career field. They can be found at the Office of Personnel Management website: <http://www.opm.gov>.

Position Description. This is a written outline of the duties and responsibilities. Ask the interviewer if you can review the job description ahead of time.

Preparing for the Interview

Based on your knowledge about the job and your qualifications, you can better assess your strong and weak points... what you need to emphasize in the interview. Prepare some notes and study them ahead of time. The best way to prepare for interviews is to role play. Have someone run through questions and rehearse your responses. There are common questions that most interviewers ask such as, "Why do you want this job?" or "What do you bring to the job; i.e., why should we hire you?" or "Why did you leave your last position?"



There are three basic types of questions:

- Closed-Ended Questions. These are yes/no, true/false, or multiple choice questions that solicit a single response. You can take advantage of these questions by not stopping at "yes/no", but expanding on your strong points.
- Open-Ended Questions. This is the most common type of questions used by interviewers. They begin with, "Tell me about...", or Describe your experience in...".
 - You need to tell them as much as possible in answering these questions, but avoid rambling. Concentrate on what is being asked and highlight your experience, education, or your willingness to learn, but answer the question.
 - Don't sell yourself short --- if you don't have experience in that area, draw upon your education or school work such as courses taken, projects in school, extra curricula activities that demonstrated leadership, teamwork, etc.
 - If you don't have any experience, then be honest and tell the interviewer that you don't have any experience in that area, but are willing to learn.
- Problem Solving. This type of question may be used to measure analytical ability. The question involves a hypothetical situation which will allow you to verbally describe what you would do. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer, what is being judged is your ability to take a position, the logic used to come to that conclusion and the thoroughness of your analysis; ie., what things did you consider.

During the Interview

1. Time and Place. If you are given a choice, schedule interviews in the morning, both you and the interviewer will be fresher earlier in the day. Allow yourself plenty of time and get there early (it will give you time to relax).
2. Appearance. First impressions are key! The general rule is “dress as they do”, but one step up. Collared shirts and long pants (preferably no jeans) for boys, and dress or blouse/long pants (no low cuts, spaghetti straps, or short skirts) for girls.
3. Body Language. This accounts for 50% of the interview. The way you sit, stand and walk reveal your emotions. Learn to relax (take deep breaths).
 - a. Introduce yourself and make eye contact.
 - b. Sitting. Make yourself comfortable. Sit a little forward in your chair, feet on the ground, hands in your lap or on the armrest of the chair. Don't cross your arms over your chest --- this nonverbal action communicates that you are closed minded and not open to change or new ideas.
 - c. Control your hands and feet. Don't drum your fingers, fidget, fuss with your hair, etc. Don't tap your feet, swing your legs, etc.
 - d. Facial Expressions. Smile!
 - e. Eye Contact. As you talk, make and maintain eye contact as much as possible --- it indicates honesty and sincerity.
4. Talk. Use complete sentences. Stick to the facts, but emphasize your accomplishments. Avoid use of acronyms. Be assertive and enthusiastic.
5. Essential Equality. Remember that despite differences, achievements, and backgrounds, each individual is equally valuable and important. You may not have the necessary experience, but you may have other qualities that make you a better candidate. Take the opportunity to emphasize those qualities.
6. Ask Questions. At the end of the interview, there is normally a time for you to ask questions. Make a list ahead of time. Some questions include: hours of work, requirements for shift work or overtime, specific duties, etc. These questions are important in deciding whether this is the right job for you.



Before you leave, ask: What happens next? When can I anticipate the results of the interview?



After the Interview

1. Thank the interviewer(s) for their time and shake their hands (making eye contact).
2. Depending on the circumstances, you may want to follow up with the interviewer via phone or by sending a note thanking them for the interview.

Common Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself. *This is normally an introductory question to get you to relax. Summarize your work experience, education, and accomplishments but don't go into too much detail (that will come later).*
2. Why do you want this job? *Talk about how your education and experience has prepared you for the job and the challenges (this is where your research about the job and the organization will pay off).*
3. Describe your experience in... *This is where you will be able to give specific work examples, highlight duties and responsibilities directly related to the position you are applying for, and list your accomplishments. Spend time on your answer.*
4. Where do you see yourself five years from now? *Anticipate that you will get promoted and that you will remain with the organization/company. They want to measure your loyalty and work ethics.*
5. What was your greatest accomplishment? *Here's where you have an opportunity to be creative. Take the opportunity to also highlight your work ethic, integrity, etc.*
6. What was your greatest failure/weakness? *Try to turn this into a positive by talking about what you learned from the failure.*