Interview Strategies Guide

Congratulations!! Your well written resume and job search efforts have landed you an interview. If you perform well in the interview there is a good chance that you will “seal the deal” and get a job offer. If you perform poorly chances are someone else will get the offer and your job search will continue. As part of the employment navigation journey our role is to give you the tools and advice to prepare you for an interview. The rest is up to you. During this portion of the employment navigation process you will receive:

- Strategies on how to prepare for and give a strong interview
- Soft skills assessment
- Tips on how to sharpen your soft skills competencies
- Mock interviews

Interview Strategies:

In-person interview: Your first step to preparing for a successful interview is to know all you can about the company you are interviewing for. Here are few useful tips on how to research a company.

- Find the company’s website and learn all you can about the company; some useful information you may find about the company online:
  - The company’s mission statement/value proposition
  - Multiple locations, locally and nationally
  - Company directory where you may learn about the background of the person interviewing you
  - The products and services the company provides
- Ask a friend or relative who is already working there
  - You will learn a lot about the corporate culture and management’s expectations of their employees
  - You may discover there is an opportunity for you to shadow an employee at the company for a day
  - A friend or relative working at a company you are interested in can be a strong advocate with management or at least a good reference
- Check out the company’s social media page
  - Many companies use social media to disseminate news or milestones
  - Social media is a good way for you to learn about a company’s community involvement
- Take relevant notes about the company and develop questions you can ask during the interview
  - Asking relevant questions about a company during an interview demonstrates your initiative in researching the company and your sincere interest in working there
  - Limit your questions to three or four and never ask about compensation
Interview Strategies Guide

Know the position you are applying for. Believe it or not many people who make it to an interview are still not completely sure what the position they are interviewing for is and how they match up to it. Try the tips below to prepare you for interview success.

- **Make sure you know the job description front and back before you interview.** Use the job description’s specific keywords in your answers. Highlight how your past experience lines up perfectly with the position’s “Required Qualifications”
- **You must have concrete examples of how you meet the specific criteria in a job posting.** Your top stories that demonstrate your qualifications must dovetail with the job requirements listed in the job posting
- **Your employer’s problems are spelled out in the job description.** Employers don’t hire unless they absolutely have to so they have a problem and they are looking to hire someone to address it. Figuring out how to decipher a job description to reveal employer’s problems then having concrete examples of how you solved similar problems will impress any hiring manager

Know Thyself. Today’s hiring managers are savvy and will use an arsenal of open-ended questions to get an idea of your employment history, work ethic and soft skills in addition to your relevant technical experience. The tips below will prepare you for general interview questions.

- **Tell a story.**
  - Prepare, rehearse and deliver compelling stories as examples of your strengths
  - You should have three or four stories to discuss related to soft skills such as an example of you worked well with others; a story of how you resolved a conflict; a story of how you overcame a challenge at work
  - Be prepared to have an honest discussion about your weaknesses/challenges, how you dealt with them and how you overcame them
- **Be positive**
  - Avoid making negative statements about past employers or coworkers
  - Show that you are enthusiastic about the job
  - Focus on positive experiences to discuss
- **Nail down the soft skills.**
  - Show up ten minutes early-never show up late to an interview
  - Dress appropriately for the interview; dress in slacks, button down collared shirt/dress or pants suit and dress shoes at a minimum; avoid wearing cologne/perfume and make sure you are neatly groomed
  - Deliver a firm handshake, sit erect and look your interviewer/s in the eye when speaking to them; speak in clear full sentences; make sure you understand the question before you answer; ask for clarification when necessary
  - Have a notebook and pen along with extra copies of your resume
- **Follow up**
  - Make sure you send a short thank you letter or email to show your appreciation for the interview and to demonstrate your continued interest in the position
Interview Strategies Guide

Phone interview: Phone interviews are more common than you may think. Like in-person interviews, phone interviews may or may not lead to a job offer depending on how well you do. Follow the tips below to prepare for and execute a stellar phone interview.

- **Prepare.** Block off an hour before your scheduled interview time so you can get organized. Make sure you are in a quiet room. Close the door and windows if necessary. Background noise will distract to you and the interviewers.
- **Your resume, a notebook and pens should be nearby.** The last thing you want to do is scramble for important items while you are the phone. Keep everything in front of you where you can seamlessly access important items while speaking on the phone.
- **Speak slowly.** When we speak face to face visual cues and facial movements gives us context for words we may not hear. When speaking on the phone you have to speak slowly and clearly to avoid a miscommunication. Take time to formulate an answer and don’t be afraid to ask to have a question repeated. Most importantly do not interrupt the speaker.
- **Do not eat, chew gum, drink or smoke while doing a phone interview.** Keep a glass of water nearby, otherwise treat the phone interview as if you were face to face with your interviewer.
- **Draft a thank you note or email once you are done with the interview.** As with all interviews this step is required etiquette.

Board interview: A board interview can be an intimidating experience. If you are well prepared board interviews should be easy to navigate.

- **Everyone gets a resume.** You should know how many people will be attending your board interview and make sure everyone has a resume.
- **Everyone gets a firm handshake.**
- **If you can’t remember everyone’s name during introductions write them down.** This simple act shows you are detail oriented and conscientious.
- **Remember to look around the room when speaking.** Try not to focus on one person. Remember, you are addressing everyone in the room.
- **Everyone gets a thank you at the end of the interview.**
- **The leader of the board interview gets the follow up letter/email.**

Behavioral interview: The prevailing theory among HR professionals today is that past behavior predicts future success. When employers determine whether a candidate is a good fit for their company they will use behavioral questions to determine a candidate’s technical and soft skill competencies. The best way to prepare for behavioral interview questions is to develop your answers using the S.T.A.R. method. Here is how it works:
STAR METHOD – Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is a new style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring process. It focuses on experience, knowledge, behaviors, skills and abilities. This type of interviewing is used primarily because past performance is a great predictor for future performance. Employers determine which skills they desire for specific jobs and the tailor their questions around these to identify if the person has these desired skills. These questions that need to be answered are specific and detailed. Many subject matter experts recommend that these responses should be no longer than two minutes.

**Situation:** Give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome.

**Task:** Describe the tasks involved in that situation.

**Action:** Talk about the various actions involved in the situation’s task.

**Results:** What results directly followed because of your actions.

To begin this exercise it will be helpful to identify your goal job. Once you have thought of this ideal job choose 3-5 skills and/or abilities that an employer will be looking for when they hire someone for this position. Develop STAR scenarios for each of these skills and/or abilities remember to be specific, quantify when you can, not vague.

Now that you have got the hang of developing STARs continue capturing more of them. You can identify additional skills to base them on as well as get a list of behavioral questions to develop STAR responses for.

You also want to have STAR stories ready for your top 2-3 selling points.

**Example of a STAR**

**Situation:** During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events.

**Task:** I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

**Action:** I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

**Result:** We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year.

---


Everett Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious belief, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national or ethnic origin, disability, genetic information, veteran status or age.
Interview Strategies Guide

**Situation:** Describe a recent challenging situation you found yourself in. Be specific.

**Example:** Last summer I was in charge of shipping and receiving at a large warehouse.

**Task:** Describe tasks directly related to the situation. This can also describe the problem/issues you identified.

**Example:** I was informed by my supervisor that several of our shipments contained wrong items and this was causing a customer relations issue.

**Action:** Describe the action/actions you took to solve the problem. If you worked as part of a team make sure you emphasize what YOU did.

**Example:** I talked to my team members and discovered one of my team members was using outdated product codes. I immediately ensured the team member got the correct code book and instituted a process that ensured team members received updated product codes during our weekly meetings.

**Result:** Describe the result of your actions and the positive outcome. If you have numbers/statistics that demonstrate success be sure to include them.

**Example:** Afterwards our shipment record was 100% regarding accuracy and we saved our business relationship with several strategic customers.
Interview Strategies Guide

Practice using the STAR Method on these common behavioral interviewing questions:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
Interview Strategies Guide

- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or coworker.