YELLOW RIBBON REINTEGRATION PROGRAM®

Acing the Interview

Facilitator Guide

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT

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Acing the Interview

Facilitator Note:

The following two symbols are used as indicators:
💻 *(computer) indicates it is time to advance the slide on the associated PowerPoint;*
✋ *(hand) indicates there is an exercise associated with the content.*

Essential class content is noted in ***bold****.*

All class handouts are available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout. Unless otherwise specified as online only in the Materials section below, all handouts should be printed for distribution to class participants.

Class Description:

This class covers the importance of preparing for and learning how to participate in job interviews.

Stage

Pre-deployment, During deployment, Post-deployment

DoDI:

1342.28 DoD Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP)

The content of this class has been developed for the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State has reviewed the class and is responsible for content management.

Audience:

YRRP attendees

Time:

45 minutes

Equipment:

- Projector
- Laptop
- Pens
- Paper

Materials:

- Facilitator Guide
- Core Material Checklist
- PowerPoint Presentation
  1. Acing the Interview
  2. Objectives
  3. Opening Quote
  4. What Is an Interview?
  5. Types of Interviews
  6. Preparing for the Interview
  7. Telling Your Story
  8. The Professional Introduction
  9. Your Professional Introduction
  10. Interview Questions and Answers
  11. STAR
  12. Prepare Your Own Questions
  13. During the Interview
  14. Practice Interview Questions and Answers
  15. After the Interview
  16. Review of Objectives
  17. Acing the Interview
- Handouts
  1. Interview Checklist
  2. Professional Introduction
  3. Commonly Asked Interview Questions and Answer Tips
  4. Resources (online only)

Exercises:

1. The Professional Introduction
2. Posture, Gestures, Listening
3. Practice Interview Questions and Answers

Objectives:

After completing this class, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Identify differences among interview types.
2. Identify how to prepare for an interview.
3. Develop and practice your professional introduction.
4. Identify proper interview conduct.
5. Identify how to follow up after an interview.

Introduction

SHOW Slide 1: Acing the Interview

Facilitator Note:

Introduce yourself as the facilitator. State your name, military experience or affiliation, and perhaps one additional brief bit of relevant personal information that establishes your credibility (i.e., your professional training or experience).

Please limit your personal introduction to no more than 2 minutes to maximize the time attendees are able to engage with course content, practice skills, and participate in self-reflection activities.

Welcome to Acing the Interview. We will discuss preparing for, attending, and following up after an employment interview. **The interview is one of the most commonly used tools to select job candidates** (Levashina et al., 2014). It is your chance to showcase your knowledge and skills and persuade the interviewer that you are a good fit.

SHOW Slide 2: Objectives

In this class, we will discuss the different types of interviews and steps you can follow to prepare yourself for a successful interview. We will cover tips and strategies to help you gain confidence, showcase your abilities, and land the job for which you are looking.

After completing this class, you will be able to do the following:

1. **Identify differences among interview types.**
2. **Identify how to prepare for an interview.**
3. **Develop and practice your professional introduction.**
4. **Identify proper interview conduct.**
5. **Identify how to follow up after an interview.**

SHOW Slide 3: Opening Quote

READ the quote on the slide.

Michael Jordan has been quoted as saying, **"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed"** (as cited in Zorn, 1997).

Today, we will talk about ways to be successful during an interview. If you pay attention

to details and prepare properly for the interview, you may be more successful!

Let me ask some questions so we can get to know each other better. Raise your hand if the following statements apply to you.

PAUSE for a show of hands after each question.

How many of you have ever participated in a formal job interview?

How many of you have done it more than once?

How many of you have participated in a virtual interview–live or recorded?

How many of you feel you are ready to participate in another interview?

How many of you feel the need to brush up on your interview skills?

How many of you have been overwhelmed by the thought of the interview process?

We have a lot of people who may benefit from learning more about the interview process. Let's start by defining interviews and looking at the various types of interviews.

Definition and Types of Interviews

💻 SHOW Slide 4: What Is an Interview?

Knowing what an interview is and understanding the types of interviews can give you confidence as you gather information and prepare for your next interview. One could define the interview as a "personally interactive process of one or more people asking questions orally to another person and evaluating the answers for the purpose of determining the qualifications of that person in order to make employment decisions" (Levashina et al., 2014, p. 243). **An interview is an opportunity for you to describe your relevant experiences and skills and demonstrate how you might add value to the organization.**

The interview is a two-way process. You evaluate the employer while he or she evaluates you. **It is your chance to learn more about the organization so that you can make an informed decision should you be offered a position**.

Before we discuss this process, **remember, being invited to an interview means that the employer wants to know more about you**. If you are applying to jobs and not getting interviews, this may indicate that your resume needs to be updated. It may also mean that perhaps your resume and cover letter do not match what employers are

seeking. You may want to ensure that your resume contains key words included in the job description. For more information on resumes, consider the YRRP class entitled *Resume Essentials: Crafting an Effective Resume*. This class can be found on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil.

What information is the interviewer looking for?

PAUSE for responses.

An employer's goal is to gather additional information about you that is not provided in your resume and cover letter. **This might be seeing how you perform under pressure in the interview or learning how you believe your personality or values would fit in with the current team. The interviewer may attempt to find out what motivates you, how well you communicate, and if you are a leader or a follower** (Hamilton College, n.d.; Levashina et al., 2014).

What does an interview give you an opportunity to do as the interviewee?

PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: hear more about the company culture; find out about day-to-day activities of the position; discuss expectations if selected for the position; ask questions about the position and organization)

SHOW Slide 5: Types of Interviews

While most people are familiar with the basic one-on-one, face-to-face interview in an office setting, that situation is not always the case. There are several other types of interviews that serve different purposes, including phone, group, panel, virtual, and behavioral interviews. **Interviews can take place in an office setting, or some organizations may prefer to interview over a meal in a social setting.** Understanding each type will be beneficial in case you are faced with an interview other than a one-on-one interview. If you are seeking federal employment, you may find specific information, including the Veterans Employment Training course, on the U.S. Office of Personnel Management website at www.opm.gov.

Has anyone had a phone interview before? If so, how did it go?

PAUSE for responses.

Phone interviews are often used as a screening tool to narrow the pool of candidates who are invited to take part in a one-on-one interview. Phone interviews can also be useful for minimizing the cost of bringing in out-of-town candidates. In addition, when there are restrictions for face-to-face activities, this type of interview may be utilized more frequently. **These interviews are as important as all other interviews**. If you sent out resumes and are waiting to hear from the Human Resources

(HR) department, be ready for this type of interview. As we adjust to a “new normal” in how we live and conduct business due to COVID-19, it is more likely that interviews will be conducted via phone or virtual means. As such, it is critical to be prepared.

What should you have near you while on a phone interview?

Be sure to keep a copy of your resume and a way to take notes near you during your interview. Also, **keep copies of your answers to commonly asked questions and copies of questions that you might need to ask at the end of the interview**. We will talk more about both of these types of questions in a bit.

Do not read answers over the phone; the interviewer may be able to tell that you are reading. **Ensure you find a quiet space where you will not be interrupted** to conduct the interview. **State your responses in a conversational and natural tone**. **Do not smoke, vape, eat, or drink alcohol during the interview**. You can keep a bottle of water with you. Remember to **smile while you are talking**. Your attitude may be visible even if you are not! As the call comes to an end, **thank the interviewer and reiterate that you look forward to possibly meeting in person**. **In the event that you realize that the position is not a good fit for you, thank the interviewer for his or her time and the opportunity to learn about the position, but let him or her know that this position is not a good fit for you at the present time**.

Similar to phone interviews, many employers conduct interviews over video conferencing software or webinar technology. Some examples of this software include Skype, Zoom, Adobe Connect, Microsoft Teams, and GoToMeeting. The technology is always changing, but the concept is the same. **Live virtual interviews, along with phone interviews, allow for interviews with one interviewer or a group of interviewers.** If there are multiple interviewers, the interviewers may be in the same location or in different locations. While this may seem intimidating, **remember that the more people you can *get in front of*, the more opportunities you have to showcase your skills to multiple hiring managers.**

Some employers may also ask you to participate in a **virtual recorded interview, also known as an “on-demand” interview. This is a type of interview typically used in the initial screening stages of the hiring process** (Guchait et al., 2014). In such interviews, interviewees record themselves answering some interview questions provided by the potential employer (Brenner et al., 2016; Guchait et al., 2014). Keep in mind that you may have a limited amount of time to complete such an interview, and you may not be allowed to review and re-record your answers (Pelta, 2020).

Remember, **test and familiarize yourself with the software prior to starting the interview**. Consider conducting a practice session prior to the day of the interview, and log on to the software at least 10-15 minutes before your interview start time on the day of the interview. **You will most likely need both a camera and a microphone on**

your computer. It is also ideal to have a strong internet connection in a quiet, secure setting to participate in a webinar or virtual interview. It is not recommended that you attempt these meetings on your phone or mobile device, unless you have downloaded the specific mobile application (app) for the software being used (Arthur et al., 2014). Companies that use webinar technology may have a strong technology presence in their organization, and **your ability to use this technology may be part of their evaluation.** You want to be sure that you present a positive impression by being able to utilize the technology without issues.

An important difference between phone interviews and interviews done with video technology is that **you can be seen when a web camera is being used. This means you need to be fully dressed in professional attire and sitting in front of a neutral backdrop.** Remember, **employers may be able to see you accessing notes or other materials during the interview.** Conducting a practice session prior to the interview will allow you to assess lighting and background and rehearse your use of the technological software.

Has anyone been interviewed by a group of interviewers? If so, how did you feel during that interview?

PAUSE for responses.

Group interviews are usually conducted with two or more candidates and can often include two or more interviewers. This interview allows the company to give information to several candidates in a time-saving and economical manner. It also **allows the interviewers to observe how the candidates interact and communicate with each other.**

If you are taking part in this type of interview, **you should acknowledge the other candidates by introducing yourself and offering a handshake, if appropriate. If a handshake is not appropriate due to a pandemic or other reason, you can offer another type of greeting such as a nod and smile or a head dip** (Egan, 2020). Your behavior will be watched, and you want to be seen as an active participant and not just an observer. **Try to show confidence by volunteering to respond first to a few questions, but do not dominate the entire interview.** The interviewer may be looking at your participation but also evaluating your listening skills.

Panel interviews are conducted with one candidate and include two or more members of a hiring committee. This style may be indicative of a company that values teamwork and relies on decisions by committees. It may also be used to speed up the hiring process. The candidate can meet with several hiring personnel at one time instead of having subsequent meetings individually**. It is important to establish rapport with members of the panel when you are introduced, whether you are in a face-to-face or virtual setting**. **Be sure to make eye contact with the**

panel member who is asking you a question while the question is being asked, but remember to scan your gaze across each member of the panel when you are answering.

Behavioral interviews are interviews where the interviewer will ask you questions about your past behavior. You might be asked to provide examples of what you did in a past situation that may be similar to what you may need to do in the future job (Foster, 2018; Motowidlo et al., 1992).

One type of behavioral interview technique, called Performance Based Interviewing (PBI), is a way for employers to focus directly on the behaviors or skills that are necessary to do a job and then assess an interviewee's ability to demonstrate examples through past performance (Veterans Administration, 2015). Instead of asking what you would do in a specific, hypothetical situation**, PBI questions focus on what you have done in the past to demonstrate the skills required on the job**. For example, instead of asking "How would you handle an upset customer?," a PBI question might be phrased as follows, "Tell me about a time when you have had to handle an upset customer" (Veterans Administration, 2015). **Some PBI questions may ask the employee to demonstrate a skill required for the job**. For example, **an IT specialist may be given a technical issue to troubleshoot, a teacher or trainer may be asked to deliver a sample lesson**, a manager may be asked to prioritize tasks in a fictional scenario, or a social worker may be given a case study and asked to write a sample case note. In these examples, employers want to assess your ability to perform the skills required of the job. A PBI may be delivered in a traditional one-on-one, face-to-face, phone, or virtual interview, or it may be part of a panel or group interview process. More information can be found on the VA website at www.va.gov/pbi.

Finally, the one-on-one interview is an interview where you are invited to meet with one person either face-to-face or virtually.

While each of these styles of interviews is different, the basic concept is the same, and you should prepare for each with the same attention to detail.

Preparation for an Interview

SHOW Slide 6: Preparing for the Interview

Facilitator Note*:*

Handout 1 will be reviewed.

Preparing for an interview can seem like a daunting task, **but being well prepared will demonstrate that you are thorough and willing to take the steps necessary to get the job done** (Doyle, 2020d; Doyle, 2020f; Yate, 2014).

Handout 1: Interview Checklist can be used to help you prepare for your next interview. We will refer to this handout throughout the rest of this class. Please review the section entitled "Before the Interview" now.

PAUSE for one minute.

As you can see, the first few steps in preparing for an interview involve researching your prospective employer.

Interviewers are likely to describe an interviewee who lacks knowledge of the company as unprepared. You should **be prepared to answer questions concerning the company and its industry**; do your homework!

You need to understand the exact position for which you are interviewing, so you can research typical duties, responsibilities, and salary range. Learn as much as possible about the employer's needs. Finding out more than the average interviewee about the organization and the hiring manager's concerns may set you apart from others who are interviewing for the position and may make a lasting impression on the interviewer.

Make time to research the company with whom you are interviewing. **Review their website, and follow the company on social media** (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). You should understand the key industry in which the company operates.

The better you understand the organization the better you will be able to answer questions during the interview process (Doyle, 2020f; Hamilton College, n.d.). How do you find information about the company?

PAUSE for responses.

Most organizations are easily found on the internet, and information is readily available about aspects of the organization, such as their mission statement, financial reports, product development, and logistics. If the organization you are looking for is publicly traded, you can probably find them using a search engine, such as Google**. It is often helpful to check the latest news about the organization. Check annual reports or other printed materials from the company**. Make sure you check the company website as organizations profile what is most important to them on their website. Although the internet will be your biggest asset in finding information, **do not miss the opportunity to get firsthand information from employees who are currently working for the company**. Professional online networking sites, such as LinkedIn, can be a resource for finding connections to companies to which you are applying. **Do not forget about customers who use the business and vendors who service the business. Each may have different information and perspectives to offer about the culture of the business.**

Another important tip is to avoid being late. Being late for an interview my cost you the job! Aim to arrive 10-15 minutes early. **Take the time to travel to the location a day or two before the interview to see how long it takes to get there. Do this at the same time of day you will need to leave for the actual interview** (Indeed, 2020b; Joyce, n.d.). Why would that be important?

PAUSE for responses.

This will allow you to be familiar with traffic patterns. For instance, are you traveling during peak traffic time? Are you entering school zones during drop-off or pick-up times? Are there other obstacles you might encounter on your way? **Check parking situations if you are in a personal vehicle and consider how far you might have to walk to get to the interview.**

Allow yourself plenty of time to get to the location so you can catch your breath and calm your nerves before the interview begins. **Remember to bring a note pad and pen so you can take notes and turn off your phone upon arrival.** In addition, **bring several copies of your resume so you can offer a hard copy to your interviewers. Be sure to look it over before you begin the interview** as the interviewer will most likely use your resume to prompt questions, and you need to make sure your answers match the information you gave on the resume (Doyle, 2019a). **You may also be asked to provide a list of references to the interviewer. It's best to have these prepared and printed in advance.** You may also wish to have a copy of your resume and references readily available on your phone in case the interviewers ask for an emailed copy.

Plan ahead for how you will dress on the day of the interview. If you are unsure what to wear to the interview, ask a human resources representative for guidance. **Be sure to wear clothes that are appropriate for the job and the industry** (Buj, 2017; Indeed,

2018). For example, if you are interviewing for a job as a foreman for a construction site and the interview is on location, there is no need to wear a suit and wing tip shoes or heels. If you think you might be asked to perform a task related to your job, make sure you have the proper clothing and tools to do so. If you are still in doubt, remember that **it is better to find yourself overdressed than underdressed** (Yate, 2014). There is no need to spend a small fortune on new clothes for an interview. In most cases, employers are looking for someone who is clean and neat and has paid attention to detail (Yate, 2014). Wear something that makes you feel confident. If you are confident about your appearance, it will likely translate to your attitude and body language.

Ensure you are well rested, fed, and hydrated prior to your interview.

Finally, if you have not already informed your references that you have listed them, **it is good practice to let them know prior to your interview. Sending them your resume and a brief description of the job may help them tailor their reference to fit the role for which you are interviewing.**

SHOW Slide 7: Telling Your Story

After researching the company, you should prepare yourself for the interview. This is an opportunity to sell yourself beyond paper. Your resume told the interviewer what you did; now, you need to tell him or her how you did it. To do this successfully, you need to know how to tell your story in a short, concise statement often referred to as a professional introduction. It may also be called personal branding, an elevator pitch, or a 30-second commercial.

What is a professional introduction?

The professional introduction is a statement that describes the skills and services you have to offer an employer. It is a brief monologue that sells your professional abilities. It is also a great way to be prepared when an interviewer says, “Tell me a little bit about yourself” (Doyle, 2019b; Old Dominion University, n.d.; Towson University Career Center, n.d.; University of Maryland Baltimore Country Career Center, n.d.).

How many of you have ever developed a professional introduction?

PAUSE for a show of hands.

Now, you are going to get the opportunity to do so.

SHOW Slide 8: The Professional Introduction

EXERCISE 1: The Professional Introduction

Facilitator Note:

Handout 2 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to have practice in promoting themselves professionally. This should take approximately 10 minutes. If there are attendees who have already developed a professional introduction, ask them to pair up with participants who have not yet done so.

Let's go over the elements of a professional introduction as outlined on this slide and on **Handout 2: Professional Introduction**. I will explain what you should include and give you some examples.

First, **you need to create a greeting that includes your first and last name**. For example, "Hello, my name is John Smith." Then, **list your accumulated experience in your specific industry and jobs**. For example, "I have 5 years of experience as a security guard with expertise in the fields of Security Assistance and Cooperation, Program Management and Training, and Strategic Planning." **Include some of areas of expertise with regard to major job functions and skill categories**. For example, **"**I am experienced with establishing a consensus among diverse groups of individuals." Next, **list your strengths – the specific skills that you possess**, like "I understand the team concept as a leader and as a follower, and I can problem-solve." **Summarize your specific accomplishments that emphasize your strengths**. For example, "I have led complex organizations successfully at all levels in a multi-national arena and received awards from the U.S. Army and the U.S. Department of State." Finally, **explain what your job search strategy is and what you want to do with your experience**. For example, "I am interested in expanding my experience into the fields of national security and defense cooperation abroad."

Now, it is your turn. This will be a two-part exercise. First, you will fill out the template on your handout to create your own professional introduction. Spend about 5 minutes creating your personal introduction. Then, share your introduction with a partner. Provide feedback. Feel free to ask me questions as you fill out the handout.

STOP after 5 minutes, and tell participants to start sharing their professional introduction with their partner. STOP after another 5 minutes, and ask the following question:

How did it feel to write an introduction about yourself?

PAUSE for responses.

SHOW Slide 9: Your Professional Introduction

When you refine your professional introduction, remember these points:

- **Emphasize your strengths, and link them to the needs of the employer;**
- **Use descriptive statements or specific examples of your acquired skills and abilities; and**
- **State the kind of position you are seeking**

You should have your professional introduction basics memorized. This will ensure your ability to tailor your statements to the audience and the position for which you are applying. Also, PRACTICE your introduction! This can help make it seem more natural when telling an interviewer about yourself.

Thank you for working on and sharing your personal introductions. Now that you know how to respond to "Tell me about yourself," let's take a look at other elements that will help you prepare for your interview.

SHOW Slide 10: Interview Questions and Answers

You may find it helpful to practice the question and answer portion of the interview. Being prepared for this portion of the interview will help you answer the questions naturally and sincerely, and you may feel and appear more confident, organized, and focused.

Often the questions asked by employers are intended to help them understand your experiences in the workplace. **Even if you do not have experience that is specific to the workplace in which you are interviewing, it does not mean that you do not have transferable skills. You can highlight your transferable skills by preparing stories about experiences from your prior work that relate to the current job prospect.**

Be aware **there are questions that are illegal for interviewers to ask**. For example, **it is illegal for employers to make hiring decisions based on someone's race, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information** (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.-b). In the military, some of this information may be known to your command or superiors; however, in the civilian sector, employers are unable to screen candidates based on these criteria. As such, **applicants are not recommended to disclose this information in an interview or on a cover letter or resume.**

While it is generally considered illegal for an employer to ask if you have a

disability or ask for your medical information, they are permitted to do so for affirmative action purposes. Furthermore, **employers may ask if you are able to perform the tasks of the job with or without reasonable accommodations** (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.-a). Therefore, it is important to read the entire job description. **It is the employee's choice whether to voluntarily disclose his or her disability during the interview process, after an offer is made, or not at all.**

Keep in mind that many laws offer protections for veterans, including Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, commonly called USERRA. Employers may ask for disabled veteran status for affirmative action purposes, and it is up to the veteran to voluntarily self-identify as such (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.-c)**.**

Remember, certain states and geographic regions have laws that pertain to interview questions. For example, on January 6, 2020, in an effort to narrow the gender wage gap, a new salary history ban was implemented in New York. This ban made it illegal for any public or private employer to ask prospective or current employees about their salary history (New York State, 2020).

For more information about illegal interview questions, contact your state's Department of Human Rights, your local employment office, or the Department of Labor's CareerOneStop website at www.careeronestop.org.

Be mindful when using language, jargon, terminology, or acronyms that are specific to military culture and communities if you are applying for certain jobs. Some phrases to avoid and alter include the following (G.I. Jobs, n.d.):

- "Roger that" (suggest using *understood* or *OK* instead)
- Execute (suggest using *carry out* or *implement* instead)
- **Using a 24-hour clock** (e.g., 1400 as opposed to 2:00 p.m.)
- NATO letters (e.g., Alpha, Bravo, Charlie) unless appropriate for the job discipline
- Ranks
- **MOS and other acronyms**

You may also need to describe elements of your military job in civilian terms. There are tools available to assist with this, such as the Veterans Job Matcher through the CareerOneStop website at www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Jobs/match-veteran-jobs.aspx. Here you can search for civilian occupations based on your military experience. By using these tools, you can view the type of language and terminology that is used in the civilian sector for positions similar to your military job.

SHOW Slide 11: STAR

During the interview, **listen for requests from the interviewer that begin with phrases such as, "Tell me about a time when…" or "Describe a situation in which you…"** These are cues for you to use stories and describe specific examples that provide details about the skills you have for the position. Recall that we discussed behavioral interviews as a type of interview and PBI earlier in this course. The following information includes a technique that may be used in responding.

When answering interview questions, use specific examples, however, such examples should not be graphic and should not divulge any classified information. The components of the **STAR technique** can help you do this (Doyle, 2020c; Lackner & Martini, 2017).

- **Situation: What was the situation and the context?**
- **Task: What was the specific problem that had to be addressed?**
- **Action: What specific skills/tools did you use to address the task?**
- **Result: What was the result of your behavior?**

Here is an example of how you might respond to an interview question using the STAR method.

Question: Tell me about a mistake you've made. How did you handle it?

Possible Response:

Situation: My boss was conducting a training session for employees and our CEO was going to attend some part of it. It was important that the training went well.

Task: I was asked to put together the training materials for the event. I spent the entire day making copies and putting the materials into individual binders for the participants. The evening before the event, I realized I had made a mistake and copied the wrong documents.

Action: I immediately told my boss that I had copied the wrong documents. I stayed late that night to make the right copies and fix the binders. I offered to personally pay for the additional copies.

Results: I had the folders ready for my boss before training started the next morning. The CEO complimented my boss on the high quality of the training materials.

You will have the opportunity to practice using the STAR technique later in the class when we use Handout 3.

SHOW Slide 12: Prepare Your Own Questions

Often an interviewer will judge your critical thinking skills by examining the kind of questions you ask the interviewer. You will be respected if you think about your questions carefully and have researched the company/organization (Indeed, 2020a; Kador, n.d.; Virginia Tech, n.d.). This is also a time when you can decide, based on the answers you receive, whether the company is a good fit for you.

Make a list of 5 to 10 standard questions. Revise the questions based on the information you gathered from your research on the employer. If the interviewer answers a question in conversation before you have a chance to ask it, just move on to the next question. **Be sure you do not ask questions that can be answered by visiting the company website.**

Can anyone think of a question you might be interested in asking an interviewer?

*PAUSE for responses. (Possible answers: **How would you describe a typical day on the job?**; Where does this job fit into the organization?; What other positions might I interface with while performing my duties?; Where is the job located?; What further education or career training does the company consider important for my future progress?; Is this a newly created position, or am I replacing someone?; **How would I be trained and introduced to the job?**; Does the company require employees to relocate? If so, how is that done?; Does the job require travel? If so, how much?; When will you make a decision about hiring, and how will I be informed?)*

The best questions will show you have done your research about the company. However, some questions are not appropriate for the first interview. What do you think they might be?

CLICK to bring up bullets.

Salary and benefits are important considerations but save those questions until after an offer has been made unless the interviewer brings up the subject. In the event you are asked by the interviewer what your salary requirements are, you should offer a salary range. Make sure you have done your research prior to the interview by looking at relevant websites to **get an idea of what an appropriate salary is for the position. Remember to always say that salary is negotiable** so that you do not rule yourself out before you have a chance to demonstrate why you are a good candidate for the role.

Usually when the interviewer asks for your questions, it is a sign that the interview is coming to an end, and the interviewer is wrapping up.

Are there any questions before we move on?

PAUSE for responses.

During an Interview

SHOW Slide 13: During the Interview

Facilitator Note*:*

Handout 1 will be reviewed.

Please turn to **Handout 1: Interview Checklist**, and review the section entitled "At the Start of and During the Interview."

PAUSE for one minute.

First impressions are formed as soon as the interviewer sees you and greets you. You need to look professional, confident, and competent. You only get one chance to make a first impression so make it a good one!

As the interview begins, consider what constitutes interview etiquette. For example, do your best to remember each name, be conscious of the overuse of sir and ma'am, and do not be intimidated if you need to ask someone to repeat his or her name. Use the names given (e.g., Ms. Smith) when you address each member (Tews et al., 2018). Do not use first names unless you are told to do so.

Why should you be aware of your body language during an interview?

PAUSE for responses. CLICK to bring up bullets.

Your actions, mannerisms, and appearance add up to your body language. They give non-verbal information about your work-related skills, attitudes, and values. **If everyone interviewing is qualified for the position, your ability to project the best body language might be the advantage you need to seal the deal** (Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Krumhuber et al., 2009; Yate, 2014)! **Even though an interviewer cannot see your body language during a phone interview, stand up to take the call. Standing up straight may make the call seem more official and encourage you to be more attentive during the conversation (make sure your computer camera is directed on your face and upper body).** You should remember to smile during a phone interview and in a face-to-face interview. The smile should be natural and not forced. During a phone interview, your positive outlook will be relayed to the employer. It is recommended that you are able to see yourself in a mirror during a phone interview to check your own body language and smile throughout the process.

Often, the interview begins with introductions, and introductions often begin with a handshake. Offer a whole-hand, firm handshake, if appropriate (Pauwels Consulting, 2019; Stewart et al., 2008; Tews et al., 2018). There is no need to use both hands. A one-handed firm shake can convey confidence and strength. **Be sure to shake hands with men and women the same way.**

Eye contact is a powerful tool of non-verbal communication during interviews (Forbes & Jackson, 1980; Krumhuber et al., 2009; McGovern & Tinsley, 1978; Pauwels Consulting, 2019; Simply Hired Staff, 2017). Do you agree with that statement?

GET agreement.

Eye contact may be used to determine enthusiasm and sincerity. It may also identify possible inconsistencies in your responses. Using natural eye contact may help you feel comfortable during the interview and can set the tone as a conversation between acquaintances. This could help alleviate any nervousness you might have**. Look directly at the interviewer while he or she is questioning you, but do not stare**! Blink naturally and nod your head up and down occasionally to avoid appearing aggressive. If you are in a panel interview, look at the person who is asking the question, but scan your gaze across the entire panel while answering to include them in the conversation.

If you are interviewing someone and that person is slouching in the chair, what would you think? Why?

PAUSE for responses.

Posture can indicate your level of interest in what the interviewer is saying. Good posture can help you listen and make you look more interested. **Sit up straight or lean slightly forward (without hunching your shoulders) while the interviewer is talking. Sit with your back straight with knees together and feet flat on the floor or crossed at the ankle** (Pauwels Consulting, 2019; Simply Hired Staff, 2017). This may take practice if you are not used to sitting in this position.

Have you ever been told you would not be able to talk with your hands tied behind your back? If you normally gesture with your hands while you talk, do so in the interview. Talking naturally will help you relax, show enthusiasm, and may also release nervous energy. However, be careful not to overuse hand gestures (Simply Hired Staff, 2017; Yate, 2014). **If you have nervous habits, like drumming your fingers, tapping your foot, or twirling your hair, become aware of them and work to stop them. Watch yourself in a mirror while you are talking.** If you find you possess these habits, practice talking while using your hands in a more natural way. **If you are still uncomfortable, clasp your hands loosely in your lap or place them on top of the table or on the arms of your chair.**

There is hearing, there is listening, and there is active listening! In the context of interviewing, **active listening involves blocking out distractions and concentrating on what the interviewer is saying** (Cyr, 2004; Doyle, 2020e; Weger et al., 2014). **If you are in doubt about what the interviewer is asking or need clarification, paraphrase the question and summarize what you think your interviewer wants to know, and, then, ask for confirmation before proceeding** (Doyle, 2020e). Ask if it is **OK to write down a few notes while the interviewer is talking – remember, keep your attention focused on the interviewer.** You may refer to these notes later when answering his or her questions. Also, be aware that some interviewers will allow you to take notes but will want to keep them after the interview.

Expression is a powerful way to show enthusiasm. **Speak clearly and at a natural pace.** Most people tend to speak more quickly when they are nervous. So, **take a deep breath and pause slightly to compose your answer and control your voice. Be careful not to speak in a monotone voice. Let your volume rise and fall naturally. Be aware of pronouncing your words correctly and use proper grammar** (Diresta, n.d.; Miller & Purcell Verdun, n.d.). These suggestions may seem like too many things to think about before answering a question, but allowing yourself to sound natural and composed will make you feel more confident. You can make your responses feel more natural by practicing. Remember to be mindful when using military jargon as we discussed earlier.

EXERCISE 2: Posture, Gestures, Listening

Facilitator Note:

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to practice posture, gestures, listening skills, and articulation. This should take approximately 2 minutes.

Everyone adjust your posture and see how it feels to sit with your back straight and your feet on the floor. Face a partner, and begin with a firm handshake, if appropriate. Then, practice your posture, gestures, listening, and articulation while you restate your professional introduction. The partner can work on his or her active listening skills. Then switch roles.

PAUSE for 2 minutes to allow interaction.

How did that feel?

PAUSE for responses.

SHOW Slide 14: Practice Interview Questions and Answers

EXERCISE 3: Practice Interview Questions and Answers

Facilitator Note:

Handout 3 will be used. The purpose of this exercise is for participants to practice answering commonly used interview questions. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

Now, we are going to put what you have learned into practice. Please form a group of three, and refer to **Handout 3: Commonly Asked Interview Questions and Answer Tips**. Take turns answering each question listed on your handout. As one person answers the question, the other two will act as observers. Observers, your job is to give feedback to the person answering the question and then add anything that you might have said differently. Each group member will take turns answering the questions following the same procedure. Spend no more than 1-2 minutes on each question. You will have approximately 10 minutes to complete this activity and will probably not complete all the questions.

In this class, we talked about how an interviewer will judge you on how you look and act not just on what you say. Speaking clearly, having good posture, and making eye contact with the interviewer are also critical. While you are practicing your answers in this exercise, be aware of these aspects, and practice as if it were a real interview. Face each other, sit up straight with feet and knees together, and gather your thoughts before answering. If possible, practice answering the questions using the STAR technique. Also, be sure to practice active listening when you are the observer.

The following questions are listed on Handout 3 and the PPT slide:

1. *Tell me about yourself.*
2. *What are your strengths?*
3. *What are your weaknesses?*
4. *What are your career goals?*
5. *Describe a difficult situation you have experienced, or what has been your biggest challenge?*
6. *Do you have any questions for me?*

STOP the exercise at 10 minutes. ASK the following questions, and PAUSE for a couple of responses after each one:

How did that go?

What challenges did you face when you tried to actively listen?

When you are practicing and polishing your answers, it is OK to write them down. During the interview, you want your answers to sound natural. **Have key points prepared rather than memorizing your answers.** If you are nervous about interviewing, consider asking a friend or relative to simulate an interview by reviewing and practicing these questions. You may also consider using your phone or another recording device to capture your practice sessions. This will allow you to observe your body language and pick up on filler words (e.g., uh, um) that you want to correct before your interview. You can find the questions from this exercise and tips for responding to them on **Handout 3: Commonly Asked Interview Questions and Answer Tips**, which is available for download on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

Does anyone have any questions before we move on?

After an Interview

SHOW Slide 15: After the Interview

Facilitator Note*:*

Handout 1 will be reviewed.

Please turn to **Handout 1: Interview Checklist**, and review the section entitled "At the End of and After the Interview."

PAUSE for one minute.

Finish your interview with grace and confidence. If you end on a good note with a positive attitude, it might influence any doubts the interviewer had during the process. Even if you are worried about your performance, do not show it. **Remember that the interviewer is watching your body language**. Keep your head up and smile. Be sure to offer a strong handshake, if appropriate, and make good eye contact**. At this time, it is also acceptable to ask how the rest of the hiring process will work** (Barrett, n.d.; Doyle, 2020b). Many people fear appearing aggressive when asking about hiring, but your enthusiasm will assure the interviewer that you are interested in the job. Also, remember to ask for a business card so you can have the correct spelling of the interviewer's name and position when you write your thank you note or email (Indeed, 2020b). If your interviewer does not have a business card, you can also ask for an email address or connect on LinkedIn.

The interview is not over until you are out of the building and away from employees. If you pass a receptionist or other employees in the hall on the way out, smile and be polite. You never know who might have influence in the hiring process. Keep your composure while you are leaving the building. **Do not make phone calls or do a victory dance until you are out of eyesight and earshot.**

After you finish the interview and after you are out of eyesight and earshot, write down notes from your meeting. Do this while your thoughts are fresh in your mind. Include additional thoughts that you may not have been able to discuss during the meeting, or include notes about ideas on which you may wish to elaborate (Doyle, 2020b; Hamilton College, n.d.). These notes will help you when you write your thank you note and when you analyze your performance later.

When you get home, get out the notes you wrote after the interview. You will use these to write a thank you note. **Thank you notes are a professional way to thank the interviewer for his or her time and a good way to reiterate why you are right for the job.** You can think of this as an additional opportunity to remind the interviewer of your interest in the position and include any ideas or information that might have been left out of the original interview.

There are two schools of thought concerning thank you notes. Some say an email is sufficient. Others say, sending a thank you email immediately after the interview is good, and following up with a written note sent via regular mail is preferred. Make your choice depending on the culture of the company. If the business atmosphere is more formal, be sure to send a more formal thank you letter. **Send a thank you note to anyone who spent his or her time with you** (Doyle, 2020a; Tews et al., 2018). At this point, **notify your references that you have had an interview, and inform them, if you have not already done so, that they might be contacted on your behalf.**

Here are some final thoughts on thank you notes. **Your language must be professional regardless of which format you use (e.g., email or hand written).** Beware that your military jargon may slip into your written communication (e.g., V/R), and you may want to avoid that for civilian positions. Be certain to spell check and grammar check all communications, and use full sentences and professional language. While we often send brief or truncated email messages, this is not the time to send an email saying *thanks for the interview* with no other information. Take note of your handwriting. If you do not have neat handwriting, you will want to type your thank you note, even if sending via the postal service, and provide a handwritten signature. You want to be sure that the notes you send are legible and professional.

Even after all the preparation and attention to detail, sometimes an interview is not successful. **Realize there are many reasons that can prevent you from getting the job. Sometimes, the company will not hire anyone or will only hire from within; sometimes, your style may not fit the style of the company; and sometimes, you**

may be overqualified or underqualified for the position. Remember, rejections are part of the process, and try not to take it personally. There is good that can come from every interview regardless of the outcome. Do not get discouraged.

If you are not offered a job after an interview, you may wish to ask the employer what the basis was for his or her decision and for feedback on your interview. This will help you prepare for future interviews. While it is appropriate to ask for feedback, do not be discouraged if employers do not share their reasoning with you.

You may wish to send a follow-up thank you note or email if you are not offered the position. This is generally viewed as a gracious response, and employers are impressed by those who take the time to engage in this practice. It leaves a positive impression with the employer. **They may remember this when they have other openings, or if the person who was selected for the job does not work out.**

As a reminder, the handouts for this class contain helpful resources to help you in your job search and outline what we have been talking about to help you during the interview process. Handout 4: Resources is an online-only handout that can be found on the YRRP website at www.yellowribbon.mil/cms/event-handout.

Remember, even if you ace your interview, there may be other elements of the job-search process involved in candidate screenings. **Employers may utilize reference checks, background screenings, finger printing, drug testing, credit reports, social media reviews, driving record review, and/or personality assessments as part of their process.** Depending on the type of job you are applying for and the geographic region of the position, these screening tools may be required. For example, positions in the banking industry may require credit checks, and positions working with children or minors may require background checks.

Summary

SHOW Slide 16: Review of Objectives

We covered a lot of information involving the interview process today. We learned about the different types of interviews and the steps necessary to prepare for a successful interview. We covered tips and strategies to help you gain the confidence you can use to sell yourself and land the job for which you are looking, and we discussed how to follow up after an interview.

Let's see if we met our objectives:

1. **What is an interview?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: elicit facts about the interviewee; where questions are asked

by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee)

2. **What are some of the ways you can prepare for an interview?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: prepare your selling points; review all the information that you provided on your resume; practice answering questions on STAR)

3. **How should you behave in an interview?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: dress appropriately; pay attention to your handshake, eye contact, and body language; be an active listener; articulate)

4. **What should you do to follow up after an interview?** *PAUSE for responses.*
   (Possible answers: take notes from the interview when it is still fresh in your mind; send a thank you email or note)

SHOW Slide 17: Acing the Interview

All of these tips may seem a bit daunting, and some of the behaviors we have discussed may not come naturally. If you have any concerns about employing any of the suggestions given, practice will help you feel prepared and confident.

I want to encourage all of you to keep working on your interview skills. The tips and suggestions we have discussed today will make a difference in your interviewing abilities. The more you practice, the better you will be. Be honest and confident, and let your talents speak for themselves. Good luck to all of you.

Before we conclude, does anyone have any final questions or comments they wish to share?

PAUSE for responses.

Thank you, and please complete your evaluation for this class.

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