

Effective Job Interviewing for Applicants

PARTICIPANT GUIDE



Course Goals and Objectives

OVERALL GOAL

The overall goal of this workshop is to help participants successfully present their strengths and abilities in a job interview. This session will provide ideas, tips, and techniques to help participants maximize their chances of success when applying for a job.

OBJECTIVES OF SESSION

At the end of this workshop, participants will learn how to:

- Develop a clear understanding of what the hiring manager is looking for
- Position/highlight their talents and skills which match the job mandate
- Prepare for a competency-based job interview
- Respond to other commonly- asked interview questions
- Display a positive, confident attitude throughout the job interview process ---Attitude influences results!



AGENDA

9:30 – 10:00am	Introductions Session Objectives and Expectations Review of Agenda Overview of the Career Development Process
10:00 – 10:30am	Model for Effective Interviewing Understanding the Position The Job Interview
10:30 – 11:30am	Competency Based Interviewing – An Overview Review of UN Core Competencies Sample Questions How to Prepare/Answer Competency Questions
11:30 – 11:45am	Break
11:45 – 12:10pm	Large Group Practice
12:10 – 1:00pm	Small Group Practice/Group Debrief
1:00 – 2:00pm	Lunch
2:00 – 2:30pm	Other Difficult Questions/Large/Small Group Practice
2:30 – 2:45pm	Break
2:45 – 3:15pm	Questions for Interviews
3:15 – 3:45pm	Tips for Panel and Phone Interviews
3:45 – 4:30pm	Non-verbal/Final Tips

CAREER and LIFE PLANNING PROCESS

The three major sections of this programme follow the steps of the career planning process:

Section 1 – Know Yourself

Section 2 – Know the UN

Section 3 – Take Action

Career planning and development is a relatively new discipline. Career planning encompasses every aspect of the individual's relationship to the world of work. Job-hunting, the most commonly associated activity, is just one part of that. The objective of career planning is to help individuals maximize their productivity and satisfaction. It addresses three main issues:

1. What skills does the individual have that he or she wants to use?
2. Where – in the service of what values and preferences – will those skills be deployed?
3. How can an individual find the best way to apply his/her skills?



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MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE JOB INTERVIEWING

UNDERSTAND THE POSTION

- What is the hiring manager looking for?
- Do your research.
- Analyze your background against the vacancy announcement.
- Read up on the Department/Unit.



PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Creating your application.
- Positioning yourself as a match.
- Preparing for responses.
- Practicing.



THE INTERVIEW

- Competency for Behavioral Interviewing.
- What should you ask?
- The job interview is your opportunity to enthusiastically demonstrate your competencies.

UNDERSTAND THE POSITION

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB REQUIREMENTS

Since completing a job application can be a very time consuming process, it is critical that you invest some time in understanding the requirements of the position.

TWO CRITICAL BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING THE JOB REQUIREMENTS

- Time savings and reduced frustration which results from applying for jobs not suited to your strengths and aspirations.
- Improved ability to position yourself to meet the needs of the position and the requirements of the hiring manager.

HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE POSITION

- Analyze the Vacancy Announcement
- What are the responsibilities, competencies and skills required?

Ask yourself:

- Do I meet the minimum qualifications?
- Do I have the skills, abilities or competencies for the position?
- Do I have a thorough understanding of the job mandate specifications and the experience required?
- Why am I **really** interested in the position?
- Am I interested in the job for the **right** reasons?
- What do I know about the Department or Unit?
- Does it make sense for me to apply?

- Does it fit in with my future career goals?

UNDERSTAND THE POSITION cont.

What is the Hiring Manager looking for?

- Consider using your contacts/network to ask/discuss what is critical for this position.
- Ask/call the hiring manager to obtain further information about the unit and the job.
- Analyze the position against your qualifications.
- This analysis will help you focus your application package, including your covering letter and resume, as well as help you prepare for a potential job interview.
- Highlight the strengths you have for the position, as well as identify any gaps for future development.

THE JOB INTERVIEW

The job interview is the culmination of all of your preparation and search efforts.

Everything that you have accomplished has led up to and prepared you to present yourself during the interview.

During the interview you need to:

- Match your qualifications and skills to the position. **THIS IS CRITICAL!!**
- Actively listen, respond with interest, and ask questions to get as much information as you can about the responsibilities of the position. This will prepare you to respond with specific accomplishments and information which will validate your appropriateness for the position.
- Take responsibility for understanding the hiring manager's needs and explaining how you can contribute.
- Establish rapport with the interviewers at the beginning of the interview and by honestly and straightforwardly establishing your appropriateness for the position.
- Substantiate your qualifications with specific examples of your accomplishments.
- Prepare answers to areas of weakness.

BEHAVIOURAL/COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWING

Past Performance is the BEST Indicator of Future Performance!

- In other words, your history tells a story about you. The story can either leave a positive or negative impression. It tells a story about your talents, skills, abilities, knowledge and actual experience in handling a variety of situations.
- Behavioral interviewers will ask probing-type questions in an attempt to determine your past performance, achievements and contributions.
- This will assist them in making an informed decision about how successful you might be in the position available. In other words, if you have done it before successfully, chances are you can do it again successfully.

Behavioural interviewing questions start in a variety of ways:

- **Tell me about a situation when you** went above and beyond your manager's expectations.
- **Can you give me an example of a time when** you used your problem-solving abilities to resolve an issue?
- **Describe** a team you participated on and how did you contribute?
- **Tell me about a time when** you had a number of demands being made on you at the same time? How did you handle it?
- **Describe a time when** you demonstrated excellent listening skills?

Which UN Core values and competencies do the above questions address?

PREPARATION FOR BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWING

The best preparation for Behavioural Interviewing -- and all other types of interviewing -- is to prepare a wide range of brief *stories* about your accomplishments. With each story, be aware of the specific skills it illustrates.

One other aspect of the Behavioural Interviewing System is that the interviewers sometimes probe for contrary information:

- if they discover a positive, then they seek a negative.
- if they discover a negative, they seek a positive.

They also ask questions about:

- strengths and weaknesses
- successes and failures
- challenges and problems

WHAT THE PANEL IS LOOKING FOR:

Interviewers will rate candidates in two major areas:

- Job or technical skills
- Performance skills -- ability to answer competency questions appropriately, with specific, relevant examples.

Job or technical skills include the specific knowledge necessary for doing the tasks to be performed on the job.

Performance skills represent important activities carried out on a broad range of jobs that reflect working habits and other personal characteristics. Performance skills often reflect how a person does a particular job.

The best way to handle behavioural type questions is to recall a specific experience related to the question, talk about the role or steps you took, and what the results were.

That is, the **Situation**, your **Action** and the **Outcome**.

UN CORE VALUES AND COMPETENCIES

Core Values

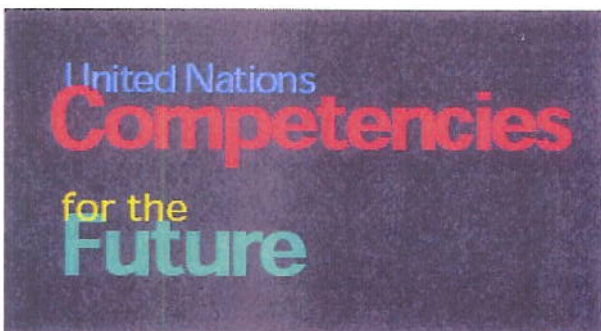
- integrity
- professionalism
- respect for diversity

Core Competencies

- communication
- teamwork
- planning and organizing
- accountability
- creativity
- client orientation
- commitment to continuous learning
- technological awareness

Managerial Competencies

- leadership
- vision
- empowering others
- building trust
- managing performance
- judgment/decision making



EXERCISE - BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWING

Join into groups of 3. Each participant will have a turn being:

- the candidate
- the interviewer
- the observer/giver of feedback

Choose a competency interview question. Be sure to use three different UN competencies – for example, if one interviewer uses Planning and Organizing, the next might pick Communication, and the third, Client Orientation. Mix positive and negative competency interview questions.

Record the question you will ask here:

Record the feedback you receive as a candidate here:

Record the feedback you have, as an observer, here:

THE INTERVIEW

The interview is probably one of the most important meetings you will ever have during your career. Yet, it never ceases to amaze how many candidates go to interviews without having done an ounce of preparation.

- Before you go to the interview, be prepared, organized and ready! You can significantly increase your competitive advantage by following some of these suggestions:

BEFORE INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- _____ Find out as much as you can about the hiring manager, department, their services, issues, challenges, successes, changes, initiatives.
- _____ Confirm time, location and name of individual(s) you will be meeting with and ask how long you should plan to be there.
- _____ Review your copy of your application documentation.
- _____ Develop a list of questions you need answered.
- _____ Practice your responses to the “Most Commonly Asked Interview Questions” and “Behavioural Interview Questions”.
- _____ Practice your responses to “Most Difficult/Sensitive Questions”.
- _____ Think about the image you want to convey – be sure to dress in professional attire, which generally means a business suit.

THINK ONLY POSITIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT YOURSELF!

COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- There are a variety of questions which are often asked during an interview. Some might be unimportant, yet they are frequently asked.
- Prepare written responses to these questions so that you are more confident and prepared during the interview.
- Practice answering them aloud.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this post?
- What do you consider to be your two greatest strengths/achievements?
- What did you really enjoy (really dislike) about your last job?
- How would you describe your relationship with your manager?
- Why did you leave (do you want to leave) your position?
- If I were to call your previous manager, how would they describe you?
- What have you done to keep your skills current?
- What would you say was your greatest contribution to the department?
- What are your areas of development (or weaknesses) and what action have you taken to address them?
- How do you think you can add value to our department?
- What prepares you for this job?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

SUGGESTED SAMPLE RESPONSES TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Tell me about yourself** - Talk about skills, traits, accomplishments and interests. Focus on what you know this manager needs and select the most relevant material you have. Be sure this is concise and of reasonable length – the equivalent of 3-5 bullet points.
- **Tell me about your last job** - Discuss what you have done, stressing accomplishments, results and benefits. This is another opportunity to point out accomplishments. In selecting what to share, be sure to pick the items most relevant to the needs of the manager.
- **What responsibilities do you enjoy most in your current position?**
If the responsibilities are identical to those in the job at hand, you become a better candidate. If they have nothing to do with the job at hand, you might be seen as less of a candidate. If your last job and your next job are significantly different, find honest ways to bridge the gap. This response is one which needs to be thought through in advance if you are looking at jobs significantly different than your last one.
- **What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?** - Again, the question about your strengths represents an opportunity to present your skills and achievements. Make them as relevant as possible. This question is nearly always a lead-in or set-up for the next question. “What are your weaknesses?” is a predictable and often asked question. Pick an area of professional development that is not directly relevant to the job itself. Show that you are honestly working to develop in this area. For example, talk about the fact that you are sometimes impatient with the bureaucracy, but talk about how you have learned to appreciate collective input while still trying to complete tasks quickly.

PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW: PREPARING YOUR QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

YOUR MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

You can be asked job related questions, including questions of previous jobs or supervisors. Think about these in advance and practice your responses.

Examples:

- What you do not like about your present job/supervisor?
 - How do you get along with supervisors?
 - Has your work ever been criticized? Why? What was said?
 - Do you think you might be overqualified for this position?
-

EXERCISE - YOUR MOST DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

List below the three interview questions that you would find most difficult.
Outline your answer for each of the above questions.

Question 1:

Answer:

Question 2:

Answer:

Question 3:

Answer:

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING

The interview is a two way exchange of information and there are questions you will want to ask in order to make an informed decision about whether the position is a right fit for you!

- Try not to ask too many questions or ask them in a way which is overwhelming or intimidating to the interviewer. Two or three questions are generally appropriate.
- Below is a sample list of questions you can select from. Add your own depending on the substantive nature of the job.
- What are some of the challenges facing this position?
- Who would I be reporting to? be accountable to?
- What does a typical day on this job look like?
- What aspects of this position, do you feel, need immediate attention?
- What kind of training would be helpful to do well in this job?
- What issues need to be addressed immediately in this position?
- Why (or when) is the position available?
- What kind of people do well (poorly) in this position?
- What skills or competencies would be an asset in this position?
- What do you like about working in this department?

What else might you need to know?

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING BEGINS WITH ACTIVE LISTENING

- Active listening is important as it shows the interview panel that you are interested and alert.
- Be certain that you hear accurately what your interviewer says. The best way to do this is to summarize important information and ask if your summary is correct. This technique will often stimulate your interviewer to be clearer and more forthcoming.
- Your accuracy and responsiveness as a listener also demonstrates specific skills you have that might be of value. Active listening is also an important vehicle when building a relationship, such as the one that might exist between manager and subordinate.
- Be sensitive to the verbal and nonverbal communication of your interviewer. Do not assume that everyone understands you. No matter how clear you think you are, the interviewer might misinterpret what you say. Check back with the other person to make sure your message is clear.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION IS ALSO IMPORTANT

Your body language can be interpreted both positively and negatively!

- Tense or nervous behaviour (like crossing arms or drumming your fingers on the chair) detracts from your presentation and conveys a lack of comfort or confidence.
- Your *facial expressions* should put an interviewer at ease by reflecting your interest and enthusiasm.
SMILE!
- Good *eye contact* establishes rapport and shows you are attentive and interested. It also enables you to judge the effects of your presentation.
- If you are being interviewed by more than one person, make eye contact with each member of the group. In a group interview, sit towards the end of the table. This helps to avoid the “tennis match” scanning that could hinder good eye contact.
- Lean forward, nod, show interest – communicate ENERGY!

THE GROUP OR PANEL INTERVIEW

Group interviews are done for a variety of reasons: to see how you fit into a particular group, see how you handle talking with several people at once, or to get a cross-section of opinions from the same interview. Sometimes group interviews are done so that all the people involved in hiring can see all the candidates at the same time.

- In the group or panel interview you will be meeting with more than one person at the same time in the same room. It is very common for UN interviews to be conducted as panel interviews.
- In a group or panel interview, you might be interviewed by a mixture of people. Group/panel discussions require you to adopt more of a presentation style to your answers (and questions). It also requires you to find a way to feel comfortable in front of a group of people.

Some tips for group or panel interviews:

- Try to remember each person's name and title and direct appropriate questions.
- Give each person some attention -- verbally and non-verbally.
- Remember to shake hands with all participants when entering and leaving the interview.
- Have a general question that works for all the participants, such as:
What is the most important skill you want the person hired for this job to have?
- Maintain good eye contact with each member of the group or panel when answering questions.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone interviews are commonly conducted in the UN system, as many posts are overseas, and it would be too expensive to fly candidates in from around the world to missions and different duty stations. They present additional challenges because:

- You have an additional burden of developing a rapport with a group of people over the phone.
- Connections may be bad, and disconnections can happen. This can add to the stress of an interview.
- Sometimes they are done late at night, or early in the morning, when energy is not at its highest for the candidate.

Thus, if you can get to the interview – go! It may mean paying for a plane ticket, but if you really want the job, this is a small price to pay. That said, this is much more feasible if you are in New York and the interview is in Geneva. If the interview is in East Timor, or the Congo, or even Bangkok, this is obviously not as feasible!

Tips for Phone Interviews:

- Be sure to get the names of your interviews, spelled correctly, prior to the session. This will help orient you more quickly with who is on the line.
- Write notes prior to the interview – you can refer to them while talking. Don't memorize text, however, as this will sound rehearsed!
- Have 2-3 questions prepared for the group.
- Some career professionals suggest that you stand during the interview – it helps to put energy into your voice, and call.
- Be sure you schedule your phone interview so that it happens in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted.

HOW DID YOU DO?

After the interview, take some time to reflect.

Post-interview checklist:

- Was I prepared? Relaxed? Well rested?
- Did the introduction go smoothly?
- Did I make regular eye contact?
- Did I smile regularly?
- How did I respond to the questions?
- What two things did I do very well?
- What two things would I do differently next time?
- Was I professional, cool and calm?
- Did I ask good questions?
- Was I dressed appropriately?
- Was I on time?
- Was I enthusiastic about the position?
- Did I target my responses to the hiring manager's needs?
- Did I communicate my interest in the position and portray confidence in myself and in my abilities/competencies?
- Was my posture appropriate?
- Did I give specific examples to substantiate my skills, abilities and talents?
- Did I make it clear to the manager why I should be hired?
- Did I thank the hiring manager for taking the time to interview me?
- What question could I have answered differently?
- What did I learn from this experience?
- Did I send a thank you letter to the hiring manager?
- Did I ask about the next step in the process?
- What would I do differently the next time?

You can also use these questions as a pre-interview checklist!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Books:

Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed (2005)
H. Anthony Medley

The Unofficial Guide to Acing the Interview (1999)
Michelle Tullier

Behavior Based Interviewing: Selecting the Right Person for the Job (2000)
Terry Fitzwater

Competency-Based Interviews: Master the Tough New Interview Style and Give Them the Answers That Will Win You the Job (2006)
Robin Kessler

Winning Job Interviews
Dr. Paul Powers (2005)

The 250 Job Interview Questions
Peter Veruki

Websites:

1. Competency-Based Behavioral Interviewing by Peggy Simonsen & Tom Smith
<http://www.careertrainer.com/Request.jsp?View=ViewArticle&Article=OID%3A112413&Page=OID%3A112414>
2. Competency Based Interview Questions: How to Give Perfect Answers
<http://searchwarp.com/swa61280.htm>
3. Competency Based Interview: Wiki Job
<http://www.wikijob.co.uk/wiki/competency-based-interview>
<http://www.wikijob.co.uk/wiki/competency-based-questions>
4. Guide to Competency Based Interviews: Barclay Simpson
<http://www.barclaysimpson.com/candidates-competency-based-interviews/>
5. Competency based behavioral interview questions: University of Victoria

http://web.uvic.ca/hr/hrhandbook/Competencies/Competency%20Assessments/Competency%20Based%20Interview%20Questions_Jul08.pdf

