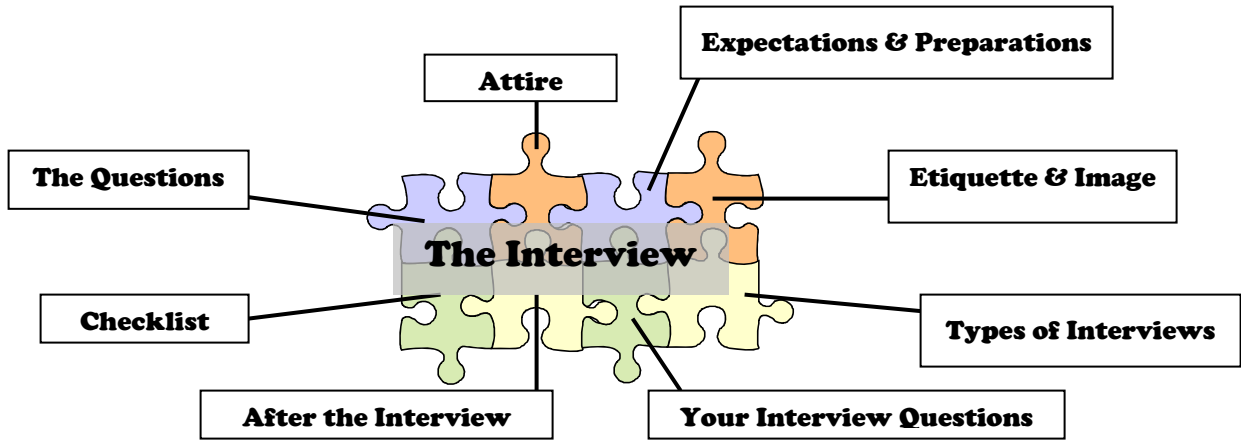


# Perfecting the Interview

## The pieces of the interview process

Read through this packet and learn how to prepare for your interview. Don't forget that career counselors are happy to meet with you to conduct a mock interview – the opportunity to put your interviewing skills into practice!



## The Questions

### For all questions, keep these tips in mind:

- Think before answering each question
- Accentuate the positive; put positive spin on the negative
- Keep your replies short, and focused on the question; don't ramble or go off on tangents
- Use professional language, no slang, obscenities or fillers ('like', 'um')
- Feel free to ask for clarification if you are confused by a question
- If stumped, say "that's a good question, let me think about that for a moment" then collect your thoughts and answer. Don't panic!
- Use the interview to evaluate the company; ask good questions
- Do not discuss personal information such as marital status, children, religious background, political affiliation

In any interview, the candidate is being assessed in 3 areas:

*Can you do the job?  
Will you do the job?  
How will you fit into our organization and culture?*



### Common questions you may be asked...

**Note:** Know the top three skills/character traits, related to the field you are applying for, and want your interviewers to know about you before you leave! Weave them in and out of the questions as natural opportunities arise.

#### 1. Tell me about yourself.

This is often asked as an opening question designed to give the interviewer a frame of reference about you and to put you at ease. There are four areas you may cover in 1 to 2 minutes: Your background as it pertains to the position you are interviewing for, academic and top related skills, relevant experience, and future plans.



**2. How would you describe your personality?**

Mention 2 or 3 of your desirable traits, keep in mind the interviewer is looking for a fit. Your research on the company and culture will be helpful here.

**3. Why did you choose St. John Fisher College?**

Be prepared to discuss the positive reasons you chose the college.

**4. Why did you choose your major?**

Interviewers expect enthusiasm in this response, often a specific event or innate interest in the area.

**5. How did you do academically?**

If your grades are problematic, indicate a positive aspect without avoidance. For example: "My overall GPA is 2.7 as I was unsure of my direction in my freshman and sophomore years. I'm really pleased however, that my GPA in my major is 3.2 and that last semester my GPA in my major was 3.65."

**6. What were your most and least favorite courses?**

Be ready with positive examples; avoid badmouthing any particular professor.



**7. Tell me about a favorite professor, why?**

An enthusiastic description of why and how a particular professor inspired you is appropriate.

**8. Tell me about a professor you didn't care for.**

Exercise tact and focus on an innocuous situation and how you handled it (you are being evaluated on the ability to work with people you don't care for).

**9. What makes you stand out as a student?**

Discuss your special skills and talents. Focus on additional volunteer work and extra-curricular activities.

**10. Volunteer, sports and extra curricular activities?**

Be prepared to identify transferable skills such as leadership and communication.

**11. Why have you chosen this career path/industry?**

Discuss the research you have done on the field and why it appeals to you.



**12. Why are you interested in/what do you know about our company?**

Discuss the research you have done on the company and why it appeals to you. Don't be afraid to mention people you know in the organization and their positive reviews of the company.

**13. Tell me about your experience at XYZ?**

Give a general overview of your responsibilities that tie to the position you are interviewing for.

**14. In your last position, what were the things you liked most? least?**

Emphasize the positives, don't dwell on the negatives. Demonstrate maturity in accepting and handling negatives.

**15. Tell me about a challenging situation and how you handled it.**

This is your chance to show your problem-solving skills! Be prepared to discuss customer service or interpersonal situations and specific examples of how you resolved the problem.



**16. How do you handle conflict? Give an example.**

Briefly describe a conflict and focus on how you solved the problem - through communication skills, etc.

**17. If I spoke to your previous manager, what would s/he tell me about you?**

Ask your manager ahead of time and focus on the positives. A good reference letter can also give you quotes for this question.

**18. What qualifications do you have that would make you successful here?**

Your research on the company and knowledge of the job will drive the skills and credentials you present.

**19. What are your long-range goals? Or 5 year/10 year goals?**

Be realistic. Relate your answer to the company you are talking with and the position you are applying for. Talk first about doing the work for which you are applying and then look at longer-range goals.

**20. What can you offer us that other candidates cannot?**

Emphasize what makes you unique. Don't try to evaluate other candidates.

**21. Tell me about a situation where you worked under pressure or met tight deadlines.**

Be prepared with examples, work or academic deadlines are appropriate.

**22. Give an example of yourself in a leadership role.**

Demonstrate motivating and leading others in the most relevant capacity to the position you are seeking.

**23. Give one or two examples of your creativity.**

Give 2 examples that show different situations.



**24. What are your strengths?**

Be ready to cite accomplishments demonstrating transferable skills.

**25. What are your weaknesses or in what area would you like to grow?**

This can be asked in different ways, but the interviewer is looking to see how self aware and interested in improvement you are. Prepare to find a weakness that may relate to the position and indicate how you have worked to overcome it. Ex: When I first started at Fisher, I said "yes" to everyone and everything. I've had to learn how to prioritize my interests and focus on a few activities I really enjoy." Do not say you have *no* weaknesses.

**26. What was your biggest mistake?**

Find a school, work or volunteer project where you made an error and rectified it in time, without negative consequences. Or, in a situation with negative consequences, relate the key learnings you took away from the mistake.

**27. What things are most important to you in a work situation?**

Focus on the components of the job and culture of the company. Do not mention benefits, time off, flexible scheduling or allude to past problems.

**28. What are your salary expectations?**

If it is early in the interview - be honest and state that you need to learn more about the position, the company and the benefits structure before you can target a salary. If you have already done your research, you may give a range (ex: \$35,000-\$41,000), never a figure. If they give you a range or tell you more about the position, express interest and indicate you are open to that range. Now is **not** the time for formal negotiations. NEVER bring up compensation yourself. NEVER negotiate before a formal offer is extended.



**29. If we were to offer you this position when could you start?**

This is a possible offer signal, but don't get too excited yet. Two weeks is the norm. Never leave another employer in the lurch to take a new position and make sure you honor your contract.

**30. Are you willing to take pre-employment testing? Either personality testing or drug-testing?**

The answer is always yes, without hesitation.

**31. Are there any questions that you wished I had asked you but didn't?**

Typically, this is a last question and the opportunity for you to provide them with information that you were hoping would come out during the course of the interview. If you don't have a question in mind specifically, reiterate your interest in the position and it is possible to elaborate on a question that was already asked.



### 32. Do you have any questions for us?

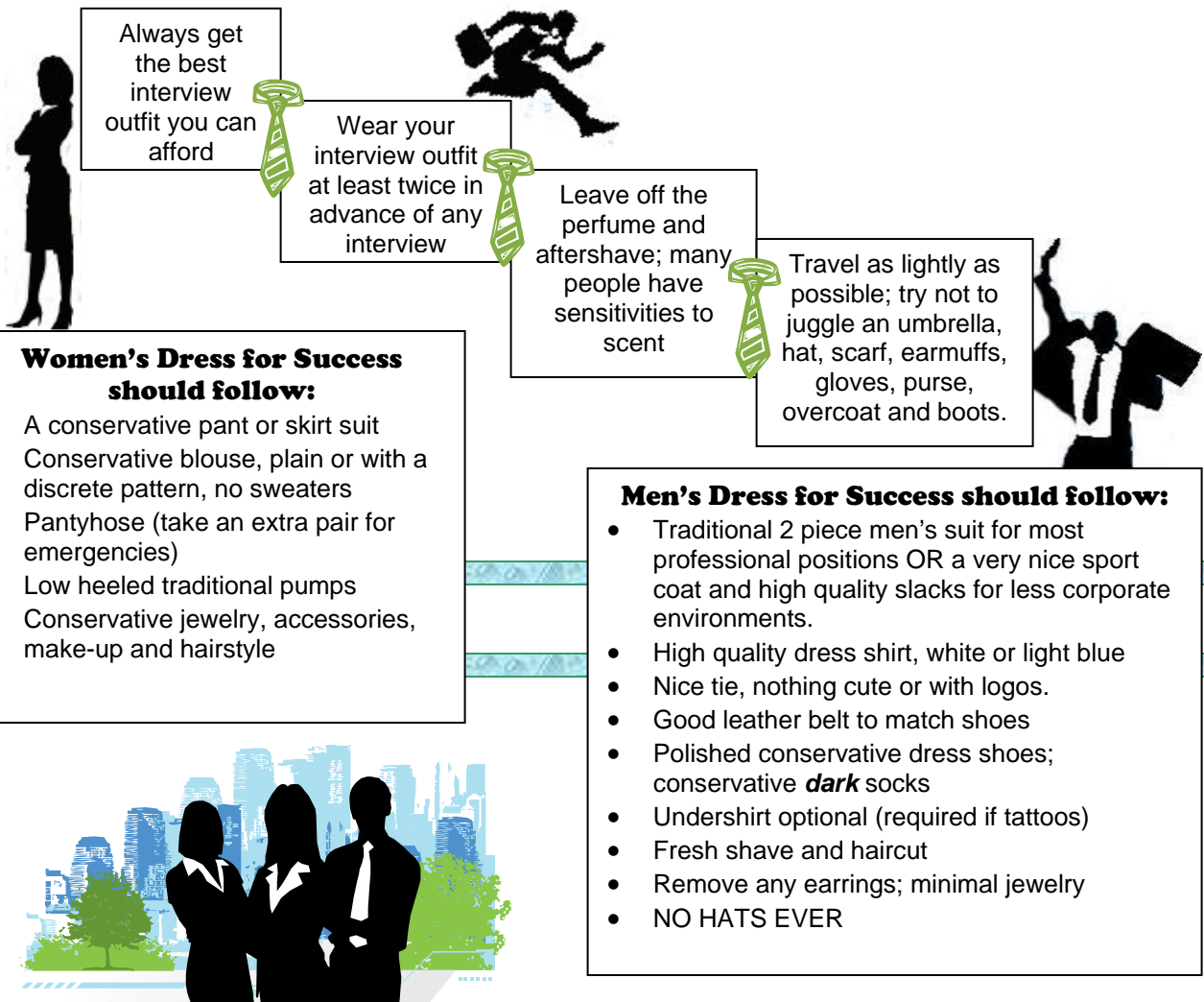
It is **essential** to have prepared questions to ask interviewers!  
See page 7 for good sample questions.



## Attire

In any interview, you should be presenting yourself in a professional manner.

**To be successful, keep these attire tips in mind:**





## Expectations and Preparations

Most professionals involved in the hiring process have high expectations that you, as the candidate, are expected to fulfill.

### Expectations of the Recruiter

- ☑ You will dress professionally
- ☑ You will be on time (scope out the location the day before)
- ☑ You have a good, **firm** handshake
- ☑ You will have good eye contact
- ☑ You will be familiar with and interested in the company
- ☑ You will be polite at all times (even when asked repetitious questions) and act professionally
- ☑ You will treat all clerical people with respect



In order to distinguish yourself from your competition and help you determine if a company fits with your plans, pre-interview research is essential.

### A Well-Prepared Candidate Should Know:

- ☑ The product the business makes or services it provides.
- ☑ The scope of the business, number of employees and locations
- ☑ The target market or clientele
- ☑ Key business issues - opportunities and challenges
- ☑ Publicly announced plans for the next 1 to 5 years
- ☑ Staffing needs
- ☑ How the company fits your objectives



## Etiquette & Image

Do expect to be evaluated on your etiquette. Remember...

Expect to be a little nervous, interviewers expect it. A little nervousness is more marketable than overconfidence.



You may be asked to lunch or dinner; order a mid-priced, easily eaten entrée and mind the table manners. NEVER talk with your mouth full.

Leave enough time in your schedule for possible sequential interviews. If time is an issue, ask how much time you should block off when the interview is scheduled.

Treat all clerical and support people with courtesy and respect. Good managers ask for staff input.

Expect to fill out an application and have all relevant information ready. Do not scrawl "see resume" across the application.

Arrive 15 minutes before your interview is scheduled, this allows you time to complete an application and is appropriate.

If you MUST be late – immediately apologize and provide an acceptable explanation. You MAY be able to salvage the interview.



You will have only one opportunity to make a first impression with each interviewer, so be sure to manage your image by keeping these in mind:

**Manner of Speaking**

- Voice volume
- Natural enthusiasm
- No over rehearsed or script reading

**Demeanor**

- Natural personality
- Positive, upbeat
- No venting or negativity

**Body Language**

- Natural gestures
- No folded arms
- Avoid fidgeting

**Listening Skills**

- Focus
- Eye contact
- No interrupting

**Physical Presence**

- Posture
- No gum chewing
- No smoking odor
- Grooming & hygiene immaculate

**Communication Skills**

- Follow interviewer lead
- Ask for clarification
- Answer directly



## Types of Interviews

### Networking or Informational Interview

- Formal or informal 20 minute conversation focused on the other person's field or position
- Ask well thought out, targeted questions researching the industry, career path and/or job market.
- Should lead to additional contacts and possibly to employment.

### Screening Interviews

- May be conducted by search firm professionals or an internal Human Resources recruiter.
- Are used to evaluate a base level of technical competence and emphasize fit and potential in their questioning.
- Often these are conducted by phone. Keep a copy of your resume nearby for reference.

### Behaviorally Based Interviews

- Situational interviews that are targeted to obtain specific information from you about challenges or events from your past.
- You'll be asked to describe your behavior, including details about the skills you have utilized and the abilities you've demonstrated.
- Use examples providing as many details as possible and take time to think through your answers.

### Panel Interviews

- Usually conducted by 3 to 5 people in the same room at the same time.
- Often arranged at a table across from you.
- Answer each question asked and make eye contact with the person asking the questions first, then scan the room as you answer.

### Sequential Interviews

- Series of interviews scheduled over a period of several days or on one day - one interview after the other.
- Consider each person as the most important person you are meeting and recognize that there may be repetition in the questions they are asking.

### Presentation Interviews

- Used especially for positions where presentation skills are essential.
- Make sure you have complete information to target your presentation effectively: target audience, length of time expected, presentation topic and available equipment for PowerPoint presentations, overheads, flipcharts, etc.

### Decision Maker Interview

- Conducted with the future manager after the others are completed.
- The top two or three candidates make it to this step.
- You may receive an offer during the interview.



## Your Interview Questions

Don't forget – the interview is the opportunity for you to see if the organization is the right fit for you. Be prepared with questions, don't try to “make them up” as you interview. Here are a few starters (but be sure to add questions unique to the position):

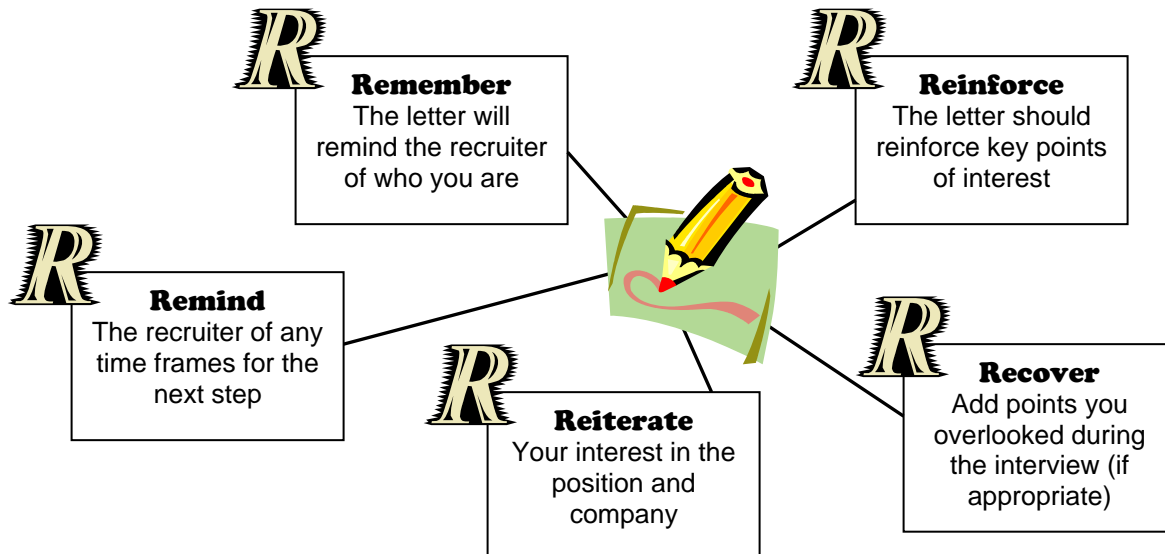
- What are the skills and attributes you value most for someone being hired for this position?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in this position? The typical client or customer I would be dealing with?
- What are the most immediate challenges of the position that need to be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months? How will I be evaluated at XYZ company, and how often?
- What are the career paths in this department? Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- What is the most exciting change you've seen in this company since you've worked here?
- What are the next steps in the interview process?



## After the Interview

It is ***absolutely essential*** that you send a thank you letter after each interview. Sending a thank you email may also be appropriate if you have communicated via email prior to the interview, the interviewer welcomes you to follow up via email and/or the interviewer gives you his or her business card with the email address on it.

The letter should be short (1/2 page), sent out within **24 to 48 hours** after the interview and should be personalized to each separate interviewer you met with. *Briefly* include the 5 R's:



**We wish you great success at your interview!**