

Basic Interview Formats

The best form of preparation for an employment interview is practice. The more you practice answering questions such as the ones listed below, the more comfortable you will be in an actual interview situation. However, being well prepared does not mean memorizing responses to these questions. It's not too difficult to see why. You could easily become confused if a question were phrased slightly differently than you had expected. Also, interviewers are cautious of applicants who have answers that sound too rehearsed. Careful preparation will give you confidence and not "canned" answers. Each interviewer you meet with may have a different interviewing style. However, you are likely to encounter three basic types of interviews--structured, unstructured, and behavioral.

In a **structured interview** the recruiter asks each applicant a specific set of questions. In some cases he or she may write down your responses. A very structured interview may feel rather rigid and formal. A typical question in a structured interview might be "What are your career goals and objectives?"

Unstructured interviews are more conversational. The recruiter has some general questions in mind, but there will be more give and take of information. In an extremely unstructured interview the recruiter may ask very few questions and leave it up to you to initiate a discussion of your qualifications. An unstructured interview might open with the statement "Tell me something about yourself."

In a **behavioral interview** the recruiter will ask very pointed questions regarding how you have handled specific kinds of situations, or how you would anticipate dealing with the kinds of challenges presented on the job. A typical question in a behavioral interview might be "Tell me how you handled a recent conflict situation."

As you can see, no matter what the interviewing style, it is important to be prepared, self-confident, and flexible. On rare occasions an interviewer may ask improper questions. These include references to your race, ethnicity, age, marital status, religion, family background or disability. Questions about these areas are considered unacceptable, and some are illegal.

The list below includes examples of the kinds of questions interviewers are most likely to ask you. While interviewers have varying opinions about which questions are the most important, they offer the following advice about how to best handle an interview:

- Be prepared--do your homework on the company.
- Communicate excitement about your career field.
- Have a well-defined career objective.
- Be confident selling yourself, but not overconfident or pushy.
- Be prepared to speak knowledgeably about your academic discipline, your chosen profession and the company with which you are interviewing.
- Prepare appropriate questions in advance (not about benefits or training!).
- Take time to think before you answer questions.
- Relax and be yourself.