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# Career Services

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



# Interview Preparation Workbook

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**STUDENT  
AFFAIRS**  
Student Services

## **Table of Contents**

<b><u>Step 1: Know the Job and the Skill Requirements</u></b> .....	2
<b><u>Step 2: Know Yourself and Your Skills</u></b> .....	2
<b><u>Step 3: Know the Organization</u></b> .....	4
<b><u>Step 4: Anticipate and Practice Interview Questions</u></b> .....	4
<u>Traditional Questions</u> .....	5
<u>Behavioural Descriptive Questions</u> .....	6
<u>Special Interview Questions</u> .....	7
<u>Questions about Salary</u> .....	9
<u>Other Methods of Evaluation</u> .....	10
<b><u>Step 5: Prepare Questions to Ask the Employer</u></b> .....	11
<b><u>Interview Basics</u></b> .....	12
<b><u>The Interview Process</u></b> .....	12
<b><u>Types of Interviews</u></b> .....	14
<b><u>Following-Up After the Interview</u></b> .....	15
<b><u>Mistakes that Cost People Jobs</u></b> .....	15
<b><u>List of Common Interview Questions</u></b> .....	16
<b><u>Sample Letters</u></b> .....	18
Thank You Letter .....	18
Letter of Decline .....	19
Letter of Acceptance .....	20
Letter of Stall.....	21

**The interview is an opportunity for both the employer and the applicant to gather information.** The employer wants to know if you, the applicant, have the skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and motivation necessary for the job. At this point you can be confident that the employer saw something of interest in your resume. He or she also wants to determine whether or not you will fit in with the organization's current employees and philosophy. Similarly, you will want to evaluate the position and the organization, and determine if they will fit into your career plans. **The interview is a two-way exchange of information.** It is an opportunity for both parties to market themselves. The employer is selling the organization to you, and you are marketing your skills, knowledge, and personality to the employer.

**Research is a critical part of preparing for an interview.** If you haven't done your homework, it is going to be obvious. Spend time researching and thinking about yourself, the occupation, the organization, and questions you might ask at the end of the interview.

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## **STEP 1: KNOW THE JOB AND THE SKILL REQUIREMENTS**

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The first step in preparing for an interview is to research the job or the occupation. If you've done your homework, you have already completed this step when you prepared your resume. Do you have a clear understanding of the employer's needs and what skills, experience, and personal traits they are looking for in a candidate? Have you done a skill assessment of your own skills to see how they can match up with the employer's needs? This is very important information to have because in order to present a convincing argument that you have the experience and skills required for that occupation, you must first know what those requirements and duties are. With this information uncovered, you can then match the skills you have with the skills you know people in that occupational field need.

It is in your best interest to identify the approximate starting salary for that position, or those similar. There are several ways to find out about an occupation:

- Read articles about people in the occupation, and articles written by people in the occupation. Sources include the internet, newspapers and magazines.
- Acquire a copy of the job description from the employer (Human Resources/Personnel) or check with Career Services. If you are responding to an advertisement, this may also supply some details.
- The **Career Help Centre** has general information files on a variety of occupations. Make sure you have read through the appropriate file and are updated on the occupation.
- If you belong to a professional association related to the occupation, use its resources. These associations often publish informative newsletters and sponsor seminars. It is also a good way to meet people working in the field.
- Conduct information interviews with people working in the field.
- Find out what the future trends are in the area. Is technology changing the job?

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## **STEP 2: KNOW YOURSELF AND YOUR SKILLS**

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The second step in preparing for an interview is to do a thorough self-assessment so that you will know what skills you have to offer that matches the employer's needs. You have hopefully already spent a lot of time during the process of writing your resume identifying and demonstrating the skills that match the job requirements. Use your resume to prepare for an interview. What skills, experience, and attributes did you identify in your resume that you will want to stress, highlight, and market in your interview?

In developing this inventory, it is easiest to start with experience. Once you have a detailed list of activities that you have done (past jobs, extra-curricular involvement, volunteer work, school projects, etc.), it is fairly easy to identify your skills. For each item ask yourself:

- “What did I learn by doing this?”
- “What skills did I develop?”
- “What issues/circumstances have I learned to deal with?”

Keep in mind that skills fall into two categories - technical and generic. Technical skills are the skills required to do a specific job. For a laboratory assistant, technical skills might include knowledge of sterilization procedures, slide preparation, and scientific report writing. For an outreach worker, technical skills might include counselling skills, case management skills, or program design and evaluation skills. Generic skills are those which are transferable to many work settings. Here is a list of the ten most marketable skills. You will notice that they are all generic.

ANALYTICAL/PROBLEM SOLVING  
FLEXIBILITY/VERSATILITY  
INTERPERSONAL  
ORAL/WRITTEN COMMUNICATION  
ORGANIZATION/PLANNING  
TIME MANAGEMENT  
MOTIVATION  
LEADERSHIP  
SELF-STARTER/INITIATIVE  
TEAM PLAYER

Often when people think of skills, they tend to think of those they have developed in the workplace. However, skills are developed in a variety of settings. If you have ever researched and written a paper for a course, you probably have written communication skills. Team sports or group projects are a good way to develop the skills required of a team player and leader. Don't overlook any abilities you have.

When doing the research on yourself, identifying your experience and skills is important, but it is not all that you need to know. Consider the answers to other questions such as:

- How have I demonstrated the skills required in this position?
- What are my strong points and weak points?
- What are my short term and long term goals?
- What can I offer this particular employer?
- What kind of environment do I like? (i.e. how do I like to be supervised? Do I like a fast pace?)
- What do I like doing?
- Apart from my skills and experience, what can I bring to this job?

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### STEP 3: KNOW THE ORGANIZATION

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The more you know about an organization, the better prepared you will be to discuss how you can meet its needs. Some of the characteristics that you should know about an organization are:

- Where is it located?
- How big is it?
- What are its products and who does it serve?
- How is the organization structured?
- What is its history?
- Have there been any recent changes or new developments?

There are a number of ways in which you can access this information. Most medium to large size organizations publish information about themselves. You can access this by:

- Visiting the company's Internet home page which you can locate by searching by industry and company name
- Visit or phone the organization and request some information on their products, services or areas of research
- Talk to people that have worked for the organization

If the organization is small or fairly new there may not be much information published. In this case, it will be necessary to do an **informational interview**. Contact someone within the organization, introduce yourself, explain that you are considering moving into the \_\_\_\_\_ field, and ask if it would be possible to meet with him/her to inquire about the company/organization and about what exactly the position of \_\_\_\_\_ would involve.

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### STEP 4: ANTICIPATE AND PRACTICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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You can never predict every question that you will encounter. If you've done your homework, you can anticipate what skills or competencies an employer is interested in based on their needs.

Make a list of the points about yourself that you want the interviewer to know. For example, if you were to apply for a job as a Sales Representative, you can be assured that the employer will want to know about your customer service skills, communication skills, sales results from past experiences, planning and organizational skills, and teamwork skills.

#### TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Interviewers use different types of questions – TRADITIONAL which can include directive, non-directive or hypothetical and BEHAVIOUR DESCRIPTIVE. Being aware of the different types can help you in the preparation stage as you build your skills inventory. It may also help you focus in on exactly what is being asked and what the employer is looking for in specific questions.

## **Traditional Questions**

### **A. Directive Questions**

The interviewer determines the focus of your answer. The information that the interviewer wants is very clear. If you have completed the research on yourself, this type of question should be easy to answer.

Example: “What skills do you have that relate to this position?”

“I have very good communication and interpersonal skills that I have refined through several summer and part-time jobs working with the public. In addition, I am fluent in both English and French.”

### **B. Non-Directive Questions**

You determine the focus of your answer. The interviewer asks a general question and does not ask for specific information. The most common non-directive question is “tell me about yourself.” When answering the question, keep in mind that the employer is interested in knowing how your background and personality qualify you for the job. In your answer, you should cover three areas: your education, related skills and experience and share something personal- an interest, activity, a passion. As you talk about these areas, relate them to the job you are seeking.

A good way to remember the format of your answer is to use the concept of “Power of 3’s”  
Three things to share with the employer:

1. E - Education
2. S - Skills – share 3 skills that you have that match with their needs and
3. P - Personal- share something personal about yourself with respect to an interest or activity you like to do.

Example: “Tell me about yourself.”

Remember: E S P – Power of 3’s

Education: “I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology, and have recently completed the course in Volunteer Management through the Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg. These have given me a strong background in many of the principles of human behaviour and the recruitment, training, and supervision of volunteers.

Skills (Share 3): I have counselling and coaching skills and experience (1) gained through my volunteer work at the Youville clinic. My part-time job at Moxie’s has provided me the opportunity to further develop my communication skills (2) where I supervise and train staff, serve customers and work in team environment. I had the opportunity to plan events as a volunteer in non-profit organizations and have gained some valuable planning and organizational skills (3).

Personal: In my spare time, I play soccer and I am involved in a vocal jazz group which I really enjoy and think is a great social activity.

### **C. Hypothetical or Scenario Questions**

When asking a hypothetical question, the interviewer describes a situation, which you may encounter in the position and asks how you would react in a similar situation. This is a good way to test problem-solving abilities. When answering this type of question, try applying a simple problem solving model to it - gather information, evaluate the information, prioritize the information, seek advice, weigh the alternatives, make a decision, communicate the decision, monitor the results and modify if necessary.

Example: “Suppose you are working your first day in our laboratory, and a fire breaks out. What would you do?”

“Before I start working in any laboratory, I always locate the emergency equipment, such as eye washes, fire blankets and alarms. I would also review the safety protocols. So in this situation, I would be aware of these. As soon as I noticed the fire, I would shut down my experiment and if the fire were significant, I would pull the fire alarm and help to evacuate the lab. In the case of a very small flame, I would ask the staff member at that station what I could do to help, which would vary with the type of substances involved.”

### **Behaviour Descriptive or Behavioural Questions:**

This type of question is becoming increasingly popular in interview situations. It asks what you did in a particular situation rather than what you would do. Situations chosen usually follow the job description fairly closely. Some employers feel that examples of past performance will help them to predict future performance in similar situations. There is no right or wrong answer to this type of question, but keep in mind that you should relate the answer to the position. If you are interviewing for a research position, talk about a research project you completed.

A strategy to use when answering a “BDI question” is to follow the SAR or PAR method to tell a story or “paint a picture” of the situation or problem.

1. S - Explain the situation or problem (P)
2. A - What did you do?
3. R - What was the end result? Did you receive any feedback? Keep it positive!

Example: “Give me an example of a work situation in which you were proud of your performance.”

Situation: “Last summer, I worked as a sales representative for XYZ Company. My responsibilities included customer service and sales.

Action: “I called on prospective clients and persuaded them of the ecological and economic benefits of using our products. I followed up on clients to ensure that they were satisfied with the products and service they received. This involved both telephone and in person contacts. I really felt good about developing strong relationships with my clients and assisting them in their buying decisions.

Results: “I increased sales 34% over the same period in the previous year and was recognized as a top sales achiever at our annual company event.”

When preparing for this type of questioning, it is crucial that you review the skills and qualities that the position would require and identify specific examples from your past, which demonstrated those traits.

## **ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Regardless of what type of question you are asked, you will find it easier to respond effectively if you keep in mind some basic question answering strategies:

- Consider each question an opportunity to market your skill set – go back and review your resume. If you’ve done a good job on your resume and really thought about what you have to offer the employer, discussing your skill set will be much easier.

- Don't assume anything. **You will be evaluated on your answers, not your resume.** Therefore, ensure you incorporate the relevant information from your resume in your answers.
- Pause for a couple of seconds before you respond to each question, even if you know exactly what you want to say. Take this time to quickly plan your answer, this helps to avoid misunderstandings and produces much more concise answers.
- If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification. This is expected and is preferable to providing an unsuitable answer.
- If you need time to collect your thoughts - take it. When people are nervous they tend either to "draw a blank" or to babble. It is better to think for a few moments and make sure that your answer is doing you justice and that there is a point to what you are saying.
- Always expand. Never answer a question with a "yes" or "no."
- The interview is an opportunity for you to sell yourself. Don't be afraid to talk confidently about your abilities and be proud of what you have to offer. As long as you can back up what you are saying with examples which demonstrate that what you are saying is true, you are not bragging. Third party observations can also be mentioned. For example, "my last employer told me that I was promoted because of how I handled conflicts with clients."
- Be very positive. Don't complain about anything - from your former employer to the weather - and don't apologize for experience that you don't have. Just sell what you do have and let the employer decide if you have what he/she is looking for. Also, avoid negative words. For example, you would not say "I have a little experience....," you would say "I have experience...."
- Don't be afraid to repeat important points. In fact, it is a good idea to do this.

## SPECIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Following are some common interview questions which people often have difficulty answering and an explanation of how to handle them.

### Negative Questions

In a negative question, the employer asks you to identify a weakness in yourself or to describe a situation in which you performed poorly. If you are asked a negative question, answer honestly, but always turn it around and end on a positive note. If you are asked to identify a weakness, you do have to identify one. However, don't choose a weakness that is central to the job and that will eliminate you from the competition. Further, always state what you have done or are doing to overcome the weakness and/or demonstrate how it's not such a bad thing after all. If you are asked to identify a situation in which you performed poorly, choose one that is not closely related to the duties you would be performing on the job. Also, be sure to state what you learned from that mistake, and how you would handle the situation differently next time.

Example: "What is your greatest weakness?"

"I find it difficult to speak in front of groups. However, to develop my confidence and public speaking ability, I have joined Toastmasters International. I have given numerous speeches over the past five months and have already noticed a big improvement."



Example: "Give me an example of a work situation in which you were not proud of your performance."

"A number of years ago I was working as a salesperson in a lumber and hardware store. One day, a customer came in and began complaining about the prices. He wanted me to give him a large discount on some merchandise. I explained that I did not have the authority to do that and suggested he speak with the manager, who was unfortunately not in that evening. The customer became verbally abusive, at which point I told him that I could no longer be of assistance to him, and left the sales floor. I learned that I could have taken more responsibility in ensuring the customer's needs were met by taking his name and number, and promising to have the manager phone him, for example, and I also learned that every customer is valuable to any business. Now, given the same situation, I would take the time to understand the person's needs - perhaps a similar, less expensive product would have done the job and would have ensured that the customer felt valued by the company."

Example: "Your GPA is rather low, why is that?"

"If you look over the last two years, you'll see that it has dramatically improved over that time. As I got into this area of study, I became much more focussed, and my marks reflect this. The overall GPA however, is pulled down by my first two years."

### **Illegal Questions**

Sometimes employers ask questions that violate the Human Rights legislation relating to employment. It is important to understand that Human Rights legislation exists at both the federal and provincial levels, and is not necessarily consistent across all provinces. Which legislation an employer falls under depends on the nature of the company. For example, working at a local biological research laboratory may fall under provincial jurisdiction while a nuclear research facility would fall under federal. To verify which law an employer would fall under, or for more information, you can:

1. Contact Career Services, University of Manitoba
2. Contact either the Manitoba Human Rights Commission at (204) 945-3007
3. Canadian Human Rights Commission at (204) 983-2189

Often, employers may not be aware that they are breaking the law, thinking that they are simply making conversation. You have every right to refuse to answer an illegal question, but be aware that if you do refuse to answer in a confrontational manner, it may have an impact on the interviewer's impression of you. There are many illegal questions that an employer might ask. Protected subjects include race, religion, age, marital status, gender (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, family status, national or ethnic origin, handicap or disability. Examples of some of these are:

- "What is your maiden name?"
- "Is your spouse subject to transfer?"
- "What religious holidays will you be unable to work?"
- "Are you planning to have children?"
- "Where did you learn to speak English?"
- "Tell me about the health problems you have had in the past."
- "Where were you born?"

### Some options in responding include:

1. Attempt to address the issue that the employer is likely concerned with.

Example: "Do you have children?"

"If you're concerned about the overtime, that won't be a problem for me, my family life has never interfered with my ability to do a job."

2. 'Bounce' the question back at the employer.

Example: "How old are you anyway?"

"Are you concerned that I may not have enough experience? Because I can assure you that I can competently perform the duties of this position."

3. Ask the employer directly to explain the question's relevance.

Example: "Were you born in Canada?"

"How might that relate this job?"

How you handle these types of questions is really a personal decision. Some people might feel comfortable answering; others may not. Many people find it best to "work around" the question, as with the above mentioned options. It is always important to consider that if the employer is asking you inappropriate questions, you may be learning about the employer as well. You have to determine if this is the kind of person/organization you want to work for.

NOTE: For students applying for employment outside of Canada, remember that the legality of enquiries made by potential employers varies greatly throughout the world.

### Salary Questions

When responding to a question which asks you to state your salary expectations, it is important that you have done your research and that you are flexible. If you know what others in similar types of positions earn, you can back up your request with that information. You should always suggest a range, as some organizations may offer other opportunities (such as training or potential advancement) that may make it worthwhile to accept less than you normally would. Also, consider factors such as access to a company vehicle. Career Services has information on salary ranges for many different professions.

Example: "What kind of salary are you looking for?"

"Career Services at the University of Manitoba has statistics that show most \_\_\_\_\_ start anywhere between \$26,000 and \$32,000 per year. I would like to earn towards the upper end of that range based on my three summers experience in the field and high marks in my academic program, but I am also interested in what opportunities the position offers."

### Salary Negotiations

When entering into discussions of salary, benefits, etc., it is **crucial** that you know your market value before you enter that room! As the above example illustrates, salary surveys can help. Another avenue is to speak with people working in that particular industry, and ask for a range (don't ask

individuals for their specific salary). As well, prior to negotiations, consider what your lowest acceptable salary would be, keeping in mind factors such as the 'costs of living' in various locations. Be prepared to justify any salary you suggest. To do this, cite your relevant experience, training and past achievements as in the above example. You may want to suggest a salary range, and then immediately ask the employer what the range for the position is.

If you are concerned that your previous position's low wage might affect the salary which you are offered today be ready to discuss your **skill level at present**. You may now have completed your program, have had considerable related experience or added specific skills to your inventory.

Finally, if your negotiations involve productivity bonuses, profit sharing or something similar, it is fine to ask for details such as "in the past, how have people in this or similar positions benefited from these? Such programs would certainly affect my desired salary"

**NOTE:** Interviews are like anything else - the more you practice, the better you become. You can never anticipate every question that you will encounter, but there are "classic" interview questions. At the back of this booklet is a list of questions which are often used by interviewers. Practice responding to these questions - in front of a mirror, into a tape recorder, or with a friend.

## **OTHER METHODS OF EVALUATION**

### **Written Segments**

Employers wanting to test your written communication will have a written exercise as part of the interview. The exercise could be writing a letter, memo, or reviewing a document and providing a summary of it. Read the instructions carefully three times to ensure you know what you are to do. Make an outline of what you want to say and then begin writing. If there is a time limit, divide the time up for each part of your outline and keep a watch in front of you to keep on schedule. Remember to review your written document for content, grammar, spelling, and overall flow.

### **Role Plays**

Rather than only asking questions in an interview to see how you would handle situations, an employer may fabricate a situation to see how you may use your skills. Normally they would provide you with a written scenario that you review and then assign a role to you. You and another person, most likely one of the interviewers, will act out the situation. There is a lot of opportunity in this setting to show the employer what you have to offer. Make sure you understand the role you are to play and then choose the skills that the employer would be most interested in. Although it may be a fabricated situation, remember the reason the employer has chosen to use a role play. He/she wants to see how you would react in a similar situation.

### **Test on Technical or Other Skills**

Some employers will administer tests to evaluate your technical skills for the position you are applying for. There are two different methods they may use. One method is a written component where you may answer a series of questions or be asked to prioritize a number of tasks. Another method is where they put you in a situation to complete a task using the skills required for the job. Employers today want to know that you will be able to do the job they are hiring you for. If the job requires you to be proficient in Word for Windows, they may have you type in a copy of a written document to see whether you have a good working knowledge of this software program.

## **Portfolios/Work Samples**

Many employers today are interested in seeing samples of your work. A portfolio should include samples of your current work and the samples should relate to the type of position you are applying for. In fields such as Architecture, Fine Arts, Interior Design and Clothing and Textiles, an employer relies heavily on a portfolio to evaluate a candidate's work and to help them measure the exact qualifications of an applicant. **It is understood that applicants in these and similar areas would bring a portfolio to the interview.**

In other professions like Education or Journalism, a portfolio is an asset for the applicant. He/she can use this marketing tool to provide samples of work and highlight related projects or assignments. A portfolio is offered to an employer and he/she will decide whether or not they would like to look at it. You can also use the portfolio throughout the interview to support your answers and provide "proof" of skills to the employer. For example if the employer asks you about your teamwork skills, you will answer the question and also show the employer a picture from your portfolio of the sports team that you discussed.

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## **STEP 5: PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK THE EMPLOYER**

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Having completed your background research, you are now ready to prepare questions to ask the interviewer(s). Try to think of questions for which the answer was not readily available in company literature or on their website. Intelligent well thought-out questions will demonstrate your genuine interest in the position. Be careful how many questions you ask, however, as too many can imply you feel the interview was not successfully run. Pick your questions with care - this is your chance to gather information, so ask about what you really want to know. Avoid sounding critical by mentioning negative information you may have discovered. This is one of the most effective ways to compare different employers, so for issues of particular importance to you (for example, whether they support staff upgrading), you should ask the same questions of each employer. Some sample questions are:

- What are the most significant factors affecting your business today?
- Can you tell me more about the training program?
- How has your company grown or changed in the last couple of years?
- What future direction do you see the company taking?
- Where is the greatest demand for your services or product?
- Where is most of the pressure from increase business felt in this company?
- How do you differ from your competitors?
- How much responsibility will I be given in this position?
- What do you like about working with this organization?
- Have any new product lines been introduced recently?
- How much travel is normally expected?
- What criteria will be used to evaluate my performance?
- Will I work independently or as part of a team?
- How did you advance to your position?
- What are the career paths available in this organization?
- When can I expect to hear from you regarding this position?

It is very important to ask the last question because employers want to hire individuals who are interested in the position - and asking this question definitely helps to demonstrate interest on

your part. Exercise judgement when asking questions to an employer. When being interviewed by a large company that has a high profile, one would not ask the question “What is the history of your company and how was it started?” You can find the answer to this question on the company’s website, in the company’s annual report or articles in magazines/newspapers. However, small and medium sized companies do not always produce publicly available annual reports and it may be difficult to access information on the company and its role in the industry. This question is appropriate if you have exercised all other ways to find out the answer.

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## **INTERVIEW BASICS**

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In addition to doing research and practising your answers to common interview questions, you should be aware of general interview etiquette. Remember the following points when preparing for an interview:

- Review your resume, and make sure that you can explain everything on it.
- Arrive at the interview ten minutes early to give yourself an opportunity to collect your thoughts and relax. Be aware that many employers will have their receptionist record the time you came in. If you rush in at the last minute, an employer may have serious concerns about your ability to arrive on time for a normal day at work.
- Get a good night’s sleep before your interview. You will think more effectively in the interview if you are rested. Also, yawning will not impress anyone.
- Eat something before the interview. If you are worried about your stomach growling, you will not be able to concentrate on the questions. Stay away from spicy foods and garlic that possess a strong odour.
- Dress appropriately for the position that you are applying to. Try to dress like the people who work there would dress if they were representing their organization at some function. If you are unsure about what to wear, always err on the side of being too dressed up.
- Make sure that you are clean, neat, and well groomed. Interviewers do notice your appearance, and first impressions are critical in an interview situation.
- Take a copy of your resume, transcript, references and perhaps a portfolio or work samples with you. Also take a pen and paper, as you may want to record some important information.

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## **THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

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There are many different types of interviews designed to serve different purposes or situations. Regardless of the type of interview, most will incorporate the following stages: establishing rapport, exchanging information, and closing the interview. Pay attention to the job titles of the interviewer(s). This can help you decide how much technical detail to provide in your responses.

### **STAGE 1: ESTABLISHING RAPPORT**

This is a very important part of the interview because while establishing rapport, first impressions are made, and the tone of the interview is set. Some people suggest that the decision to hire is greatly influenced by the first five minutes of the interview. A good interviewer will introduce him/herself, and take the lead. Follow his or her lead - if they are chatty, be chatty; if they are formal, be formal. Some employers use what seems to be casual conversation to get to know you on a more personal level - this may be crucial to a hiring decision!

## **Tips**

- Smile and maintain eye contact. This is one way of communicating confidence, even if you don't feel it.
- If the interviewer offers his or her hand, shake it firmly. If they don't, it is appropriate to offer yours.
- Wait until the interviewer sits or offers you a seat before sitting down.
- If the interviewer is making small talk, participate. Keep your answers short and positive.

## **STAGE 2: EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION**

This is the bulk of the interview. It is your opportunity to let the interviewer know what you have to offer, and your chance to learn more about the organization.

## **Tips**

- When you answer a question, maintain appropriate eye contact.
- Be aware of the interviewer's reactions. If he or she looks confused, ask if you can clarify anything.
- Be aware of what your body is saying. Avoid closed postures. Sit upright, but not stiffly. Try to find a comfortable position as that will make you feel more relaxed.
- Turn your cell phone OFF – not to “vibrate”.
- Control your nervous habits. Don't swing your foot, talk with your hands (to an extreme), or fiddle with jewellery, buttons, pens, etc.
- Show that you are interested in the job by asking questions.
- Try not to appear bored or anxious. Don't look at your watch.

## **STAGE 3: CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**

When the interviewer is done gathering the information that is needed, he or she will ask if you have anything to add, or if you have any questions. This is your opportunity to mentally review your inventory of skills and make sure that you have communicated everything that you wanted to. If any of your questions have not been addressed during the course of the interview, now is the time to ask them.

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration
- Ask the employer if you can have a business card—you will use this later to send a thank you letter!
- Ask when you can expect to hear from him/her.
- If it is not known when a decision will be reached, ask if you can phone in a week's time to inquire about the progress.
- If the interviewer offers his/her hand, shake it firmly. Otherwise, it is fine to offer yours first.
- If not already discussed, you can offer to leave a sample of your work, or portfolio if you have one.

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## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

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### **Panel/Board Interviews**

Two or more individuals interview candidates. Governments and large organizations commonly use this process. It is important to make eye contact with the person asking the question but also to look at the other interviewers while answering. Direct your attention at the beginning and end of your response to the person who asked you the questions. The questions asked in the interview are often set out in advance. The board may already have decided which answers they will accept/prefer for the questions. Ignore note taking by board members. Obtain the employers' names prior to the interview and use them during the conversation.

### **One on One Interviews**

Candidates are interviewed by one person. These interviews tend to be more informal; however, it always depends on the employer's style. The interviewer will often have a series of prepared questions, but may have some flexibility in their choices. It is important to maintain eye contact with the person interviewing you.

### **Impromptu Interviews**

This interview commonly occurs when employers are approached directly. It tends to be very informal and unstructured. Applicants should be prepared at all times for on-the-spot interviews, especially in situations such as a job fair or a cold call. It is an ideal time for employers to ask the candidate some basic questions to determine whether he/she may be interested in formally interviewing the candidate.

### **Second Interview or Follow-up Interviews**

Following a screening or initial interview, employers invite those applicants they are seriously considering as an employee to a second interview. Middle or senior management generally conducts these interviews, together or separately. Applicants can expect more in-depth questions and the employer will be expecting a greater level of preparation on the part of the candidate. Applicants should continue to research the employer following the first interview, and be prepared to use any information gained through the previous interview to their advantage.

### **Dinner Interviews**

The interviews may be structured, informal, or socially situated, such as in a restaurant. Don't be the only one at the table to order an alcoholic drink, and if you have an alcoholic drink, stop at one. Decide what to eat quickly, some interviewers will ask you to order first (don't appear indecisive). Avoid potentially messy foods, such as spaghetti. Be prepared for the conversation to abruptly change from 'friendly chat' to direct interview questions, however, don't underestimate the value of casual discussion, some employers place a great value on it.

### **Telephone Interviews**

Have a copy of your resume and any points you want to remember to say nearby. If you are on your home telephone, make sure that all roommates or family members are aware of the interview (avoids loud stereos, etc.). Speak a bit slower than usual. It is crucial that you convey your enthusiasm verbally, since the interviewer cannot see your face. If there are pauses, don't

worry, the interviewer is likely just making some notes.

## **Group Interviews**

Employers bringing several candidates together in a group situation to solve a problem are testing your ability to work in a team environment. They want to know how you will present information to other people, offer suggestions, relate to other ideas and work to solve a problem.

In short, they are testing your interpersonal skills. It is difficult to prepare for this type of interview except to remember what is being tested and to use the skills you have to be the best team player and/or leader you can be. Some employers will take you to meet the staff who would be your co-workers if hired. This is a very casual type of interview, but leaving a positive and friendly impression is no less critical.

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## **FOLLOWING-UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

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### **EVALUATE THE INTERVIEW**

After every interview it is important to evaluate your performance. This is the only way you will learn from your experiences and improve on your performance. Consider the following questions:

- What positive impressions did I make? Negative? Why did I make these impressions?
- Was there anything I wanted to say but didn't?
- What questions would I have liked to ask, but didn't?
- What questions would I have answered differently? How would I have changed my answers?
- How do I feel about the interview?

NOTE: If you are informed following an interview that you did not get the position, it is a great idea to contact one of the interviewers to see where you could have performed better. To get candid answers, it is important that you don't make the interviewer defensive by starting out with "can you tell me why I didn't get the job?" A better approach would be "would you have a couple of minutes to suggest which areas could use some strengthening?"

### **THANK YOU LETTERS OR EMAILS**

It is very important to send a thank you letter or email following the interview. Ensure you request a business card at the end of the interview so that you have the correct contact information to send your letter or email. If you are going to do this, it should be done immediately. It is a good opportunity to communicate anything that you forgot in the interview, and to reinforce your interest in the position. An example of a thank you letter is included at the back of this booklet.

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## **MISTAKES THAT COST PEOPLE JOBS**

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Think about the following points. Do any of them apply to you?

- **Oversell**: Trying too hard to impress; bragging; acting aggressively.
- **Undersell**: Failing to emphasize the fact that you have related skills; discussing experience using negative qualifiers (i.e. I have a little experience...).
- **Body Language**: It is easy to create a negative impression without even realizing that



you are doing it. Are you staring at your feet, or talking to the interviewer's shoulder? Be aware of what your actions say about you.

- **Lack of Honesty:** The slightest stretching of the truth may result in you being screened out.
- **Negative Attitude:** The interview is not an opportunity for you to complain about your current supervisor or co-workers (or even about 'little' things, such as the weather).
- **Lack of Preparation:** You have to know about the organization and the occupation. If you don't, it will appear as though you are not interested in the position.
- **Lack of Enthusiasm:** If you are not excited about the work at the interview, the employer will not assume that your attitude will improve when hired.

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## REJECTION

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Keep in mind that rejection is a normal part of every job search. For every position, if 100 people apply, 99 will be rejected. If you are rejected, it does not mean that you are not a good applicant. It simply means that you were not the best applicant for that particular job at that particular time. Don't get discouraged. Rejection happens to everyone and is not a reflection of you. Consider each new application a new opportunity.

- Six major banks rejected Walt Disney's idea for Disneyland before being accepted. They said no one would come.
- A record company, which had the opportunity to sign the Beatles, rejected them. They felt that electric guitar music was only a phase.

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## COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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Reviewing common interview questions can be an effective part of your preparation. Instead of trying to memorize 'the best' answers you can think of, we suggest putting yourself in the position of the employer, and imagining what type of a response would impress you. A question may be phrased in any number of ways so memorizing responses to specific questions may leave you unable to generalize your personal information to an unexpected question. Your best strategy is to review such questions, and become comfortable discussing yourself and your related skills.

1. What do you see yourself doing five years from now? (This really means, what are your goals within this organization? They want someone who is willing to stay and grow within their organization)
2. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
3. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company? (Remember the Power of 3's - tell them your 3 most relevant skills you can contribute to their company!)
4. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your ability in \_\_\_?
5. What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
6. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
7. Why are you seeking a position with this company?
8. What do you know about this company?
9. What are your strengths? What is your greatest weakness?
10. How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
11. In what type of position are you most interested?
12. What jobs have you held? How were they obtained and why did you leave?

13. What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you will be successful in your field?
14. Do you prefer any specific geographic location? Why?
15. What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
16. What interests you about our product (or service)?
17. Define co-operation.
18. What jobs have you enjoyed the most? What jobs have you enjoyed the least? Why?
19. What are your own special abilities?
20. What job in our company do you want to work toward?
21. What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
22. Why should I hire you?
23. Give me an example of a work situation in which you were not proud of your performance. What did you learn from this mistake?
24. Tell me about a conflict with a co-worker, and how you resolved it.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

If after reading this booklet and viewing our webshop online you have further questions, or would like to book a MOCK INTERVIEW to practice your interview skills with an Employment Advisor, please call 474-9456 to book an appointment.

# THANK YOU LETTER

October 31, 20XX

1614 Gould Drive  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
S7B 4K9

Ms. Joan Habit  
Director, Field Research  
Department of Agriculture  
123 Some Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3B 3K6

Dear Ms. Habit:

I would like to thank you and Mr. Larbit for granting me the opportunity to discuss the research assistant position with you. The interview was both thorough and informative and increased my interest in this position.

I am especially interested in assisting with the development of preventative vaccines. My experience as a research assistant at the University of Manitoba Animal Research Labs, and my Agriculture Degree in animal science have provided me with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in this position. The combination of working with animals and conducting research in a team atmosphere constitute an excellent work environment for me, one in which I excel.

Thank you again for your time. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Mack

# **LETTER OF DECLINE**

September 12, 20XX

123 Main Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2C 1X9

Ms. Elizabeth Johnson  
Human Resources Manager  
XYZ Company  
789 King Arthur Crescent  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R5M 8N9

Dear Ms. Johnson:

It was indeed a pleasure meeting with you and your staff to discuss your needs for an Engineer in Training. Our time together was most enjoyable and informative.

As we have discussed during our meeting, I believe the purpose of preliminary interviews is to explore areas of mutual interest and to assess the fit between the individual and the position. After careful consideration, I have decided to withdraw from consideration for this position.

My decision is based upon the fact that I have accepted a position elsewhere that is very suited to my qualifications and experiences.

I want to thank you for interviewing me and giving me the opportunity to learn more about your facility. You have a fine team and I would have enjoyed working with you.

Best wishes to you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Karen Redmond

# LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

December 12, 20XX

567 Pembina Highway  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R5M 9D3

Mary Smith  
General Manager  
Canadian Construction Ltd.  
3895 Inkster Blvd.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2M 9K8

Dear Ms. Smith:

I would like to express my appreciation for your letter offering me the position of Architect in your Design Department at a starting salary of \$xxx per month. I was very impressed with the personnel and facilities at your plant in Thompson and am writing to confirm my acceptance of your offer. As requested, I am able to start work on May 1, 2006.

Let me once again express my appreciation for your offer and my excitement about joining your engineering staff. I look forward to my association with Canadian Construction Limited and feel my contributions will be in line with your goals of growth and continued success for the company.

Sincerely,

Robert Goodman

# **LETTER OF STALL**

November 22, 20XX

123 Dufferin Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R4T 7J9

Mr. Brent Stewart  
Director of Research  
Agrifarms Institute  
4466 Inkster Boulevard  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R5U 7W9

Dear Mr. Stewart:

I am writing to thank you for your offer to join the research team at Agrifarms. I am very pleased and flattered by your interest in me as a potential member of your organization.

As you know, I am currently in the process of making a vitally important career decision, and thus require a bit of time to consider where and how my skills, needs, and interests would fit most appropriately.

In order to make the best decision, one that will be in the best interests of Agrifarms and myself, I would appreciate your allowing me an additional two weeks to consider your offer.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanne Elson