

# **INTERVIEWING SKILLS FOR ANIMAL SCIENCES MAJORS**



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## THE BASICS

### WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

- ✓ A focused, goal oriented exchange of information between two people which allows the applicant and employer to mutually evaluate the “fit” between the applicant’s qualifications and the position.
- ✓ An opportunity to actively, sell yourself and your skills by relaying specific experiences and accomplishments that will allow you to contribute to the organization!
- ✓ The most significant aspect of the employment process!

### OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Expand on information contained in your resume.
- ✓ Supply information to the employer that is not in your resume (interpersonal skills, communication skills, appearance, etc.).
- ✓ Gain additional information about the organization and the position you are considering.
- ✓ Provide an opportunity for both parties to consider the possibility of employment; interviews are conversations.

### WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS SEEKING?

- ✓ Oral and written communication
- ✓ Interpersonal skills
- ✓ Analytical skills
- ✓ Flexibility
- ✓ Computer
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Motivation/Initiative/Confidence/Enthusiasm/Commitment
- ✓ Assertiveness
- ✓ Honesty/Integrity
- ✓ Loyalty
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Maturity
- ✓ Punctuality
- ✓ Appearance
- ✓ Work experience and internship experiences

### HOW DO I PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW?

- ✓ Know yourself: your interests, values, skills
  - How do they relate to the position you are applying for?
- ✓ Know the organization: products, services, locations, needs, industry in general
  - Do your homework! Research the company by reviewing all materials available – both in print and on the Internet! This conveys interest and enthusiasm in the position you are applying for.
- ✓ Clearly define your goals prior to the interview
  - Focus on your job objective
- ✓ Consider the match
  - How does the position relate to both your short-term and long-term goals?
  - Be prepared to explain why this particular position is a good “fit” for you.

- ✓ Practice, practice, practice!
  - Anticipate most likely questions
  - Prepare a list of your “top ten selling points” with specific examples.
  - Become articulate, confident, and natural at talking about your positive qualities.
  - Know who you will be interviewing with and his/her function.

### **MAKING A POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSION**

- ✓ Dress for success
  - Suits for both men and women – dark colors are usually best. Conservative dress is suggested; clothes should be color coordinated, cleaned and pressed.
  - Ties are a must for men.
  - Avoid distracting hairstyles, patterns, jewelry, makeup, nail polish, and perfume/cologne.
  - Be attentive to detail – clean and polish your shoes, keep fingernails clean and properly cut, wash your hair, bathe and brush your teeth.
- ✓ Be punctual
  - Arrive early (five to ten minutes) to allow time to check your appearance, collect your thoughts, etc.
  - You may wish to visit the interview site prior to the interview so that you know how to get there.
  - Greet everyone that you meet with courtesy, respect, and a firm handshake.
- ✓ What to bring
  - Extra copies of your resume.
  - List of three to five references (name, title, organization, address, phone, and email address).
  - Portfolio – internship materials, letters of recommendation, writing samples, transcript, etc..
  - Pen and paper for notes after the interview.
  - Company information.

### **RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS**

- ✓ Be yourself, try to relax, and focus on positive qualities!
- ✓ Use good posture, listen, and provide non-verbal feedback (smile, nod) to the interviewer.
- ✓ Utilize the STAR Method in answering questions – Detail a pertinent situation, along with the tasks you were involved in, the actions you took and the results you achieved.
  - S= Situation
  - T= Tasks Involved
  - A= Action Taken
  - R= Results

### **EXAMPLE**

Q: “Do you work well under pressure? How do you handle it?”

A: “Yes, I am able to work effectively under pressure. Recently, I was chair of the Buckeye Dairy Club’s Dairy Classic Sale and in this role it was my job to see that everything got done. When possible, I planned ahead and held regular committee meetings to make sure that the work got done. At our sale last weekend, things came together nicely; our sale average was up from last year.”

- ✓ Be careful with open-ended questions.
  - Always provide as much detail as possible, using examples that relate to the job you are applying for (i.e., job experiences, hobbies, travel, leadership positions, school work, community involvement, projects, and accomplishments).
  - You may wish to ask the interviewer to be more specific in his/her question by asking for more information.
- ✓ Don't be afraid of some silence – it is ok to take a few moments to think about your response to a question. If you need more time, ask the interviewer to repeat the question.

### **QUESTIONING THE INTERVIEWER**

- ✓ You will also be evaluated on the quality of questions that you ask the employer!
- ✓ Be sure to do enough research on the company so that you can ask appropriate questions.
- ✓ Thoughtful questions demonstrate interest, enthusiasm, and an awareness of the employer's needs.
- ✓ Avoid asking questions about salary and benefits. Allow the employer to raise this topic of discussion.
- ✓ Choose the questions you ask wisely – Be considerate of the employer's time.
- ✓ Be sure to ask when you can expect to hear from the employer on your status as an applicant at the conclusion of the interview. Also, obtain business cards from those who participated in your interview.

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

- ✓ Take some time to jot down notes about the interview.
- ✓ Think about your interview performance.
  - What did you do well?
  - What can be improved in the future?
  - Are you presenting yourself in the best possible manner?
- ✓ Always send a short typewritten thank you letter to each individual who interviewed you (see example contained in *Cover Letter Writing for Animal Sciences Majors*).

### **SALARY NEGOTIATIONS**

- ✓ As mentioned previously, avoid asking about salary and benefits. Instead, allow the employer to bring up this subject.
- ✓ Investigate salary ranges within your career field for similar positions as part of your pre-interview research.
  - The average starting salary in 2001-02 for an Animal Sciences major was over \$29,000. Salaries also vary by the type of job. In general jobs in the production agriculture segment are lower paying, while agribusiness jobs such as sales positions are higher paying.
  - Resources include: The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Labor and the *American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries*. These books are available in the OSU Libraries.
- ✓ If you are asked about salary, never give an exact figure. Rather, indicate a broad salary range based on your research or mention that you trust that if an offer is made, that it will be in line with your qualifications and the salary averages in industry.
- ✓ It is important to remember that often there is little room for salary negotiation for entry-level positions.
- ✓ Keep in mind that there are many ways an employer can increase the “value” of an offer to you such as a starting bonus, company car, commissions, an expense account, housing, moving expenses, etc. In addition, benefits such as health insurance, retirement pensions, company-sponsored education expenses, etc. increase your compensation package.

### **NEGATIVES IN THE JOB INTERVIEW**

- ✓ Inability to communicate – poor grammar, inability to look employer in the eye.
- ✓ Poor personal appearance.
- ✓ Aggressive, conceited, superiority complex.
- ✓ Little interest in the job – late to the interview, asking no questions, poor career planning, little knowledge about the employer.
- ✓ Indications of poor work habits.
- ✓ Unsatisfactory verbal skills.
- ✓ Immaturity.
- ✓ Lack of interest, enthusiasm, confidence, poise or courtesy.
- ✓ Condemnation of past employers or dislike for schoolwork.
- ✓ Overemphasis on money.
- ✓ Personality flaws – cynical, lazy, intolerant/strong prejudices, oversensitive to criticism, radical ideas, overly competitive, talks too much/too little, indecision.
- ✓ Lack of job-related skills.

### **SECOND JOB INTERVIEWS**

- ✓ More in-depth, used to determine if there is a “good fit” between you and the employer.
- ✓ May include tours, office visit, and information about the employer’s culture, long-term opportunities, and the local community.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS IN SECOND INTERVIEWS**

- ✓ Maintain your professionalism at ALL times, regardless of who you interact with, whether it be the person who picks you up at the airport, the secretary, to those who you formally interview with.
- ✓ Prepare by reading more about the employer, developing questions, talking to employees or those who may be familiar with the organization.
- ✓ Confirm arrangements and expenses
  - Discuss who will be paying for the trip if you will be traveling a long distance.
  - Confirm arrangements in writing and get directions to avoid miscommunication.
  - Keep expenses in a reasonable range; many employers will pay for transportation, meals, hotel, and parking if you travel a long distance.
  - If you fly, arrive the night before the interview.
  - If you drive, allow extra time for the trip. Keep record of mileage and gas receipts.
- ✓ Interviewing
  - Be yourself, but sell yourself! Be prepared to talk about your strengths and skills, as well as the organization’s products, services, news, etc.
  - Be aware of who you are talking with. You may be asked to speak with people at a variety of levels within the organization. Frame your responses to questions and your questions appropriately. Obtain the business cards of those that you meet.
  - Observe aspects of the organization including the relationships between employees, employee attitudes, work environment, building, surrounding community, etc.
- ✓ Salary Discussions (see previous discussion)
- ✓ Follow-Up
  - Send a typewritten thank you letter to the primary contact and possibly to others whom you met within a week of the visit.

## EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Why are you interviewing with us?

- ✓ In what type of positions are you most interested?
- ✓ Why would you like to work for our organization?
- ✓ What do you know about our organization?
- ✓ What interests you about our products or services?

### What can you do for us?

- ✓ What are your future career plans?
- ✓ Tell me about a time when you had to . . .
  - Make an important decision.
  - Persuade others to take action.
  - Deal with a difficult person.
  - Handle multiple responsibilities.
  - Keep a positive attitude.
  - Develop enthusiasm in others.
- ✓ Why are your grades low? Do they reflect your ability?
- ✓ Where do you want to be 5 year from now? 10 years?
- ✓ What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in your field?
- ✓ What have you learned from some of the jobs you've held?
- ✓ What are your special abilities?
- ✓ What is not on your resume that you would like to tell me?
- ✓ What have you done in college to enhance your leadership abilities?
- ✓ In what college activities have you participated? Why? Which ones did you enjoy most?
- ✓ What experiences have you had that related to the kind of work you want to do?
- ✓ What courses in college did you like best? Least? Why?
- ✓ Do you feel you have received good general training?
- ✓ How long do you expect to work in this field?
- ✓ Do you work well under pressure? How do you handle it?
- ✓ What jobs have you enjoyed the most? Least? Why?
- ✓ What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- ✓ In what ways will you make a contribution to our organization?
- ✓ If you were hiring a person for this position, what qualities would you seek?
- ✓ Why should I hire you?
- ✓ What percentage of your college expenses did you earn?
- ✓ Do you think your extracurricular activities were worth the time you devoted to them?
- ✓ What do you think determines a person's progress in a good company?
- ✓ What kind of boss do you prefer?
- ✓ Can you take instructions without feeling upset?
- ✓ How did your previous employers treat you?
- ✓ Do you feel you have done the best work of which you are capable?
- ✓ What job in our company would you choose if you were entirely free to do so?

**What kind of person are you?**

- ✓ Tell me about yourself.
- ✓ Why did you choose your field of work?
- ✓ Why did you select Ohio State University? Animal Sciences?
- ✓ What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- ✓ What kind of criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
- ✓ What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your chosen field?
- ✓ How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
- ✓ How did you spend your vacations while you were in college?
- ✓ Do you prefer any geographic location?
- ✓ With what types of people do you prefer to work?
- ✓ What types of books have you read?
- ✓ What have you learned from your mistakes?
- ✓ What are your prominent work habits?
- ✓ What motivates you?
- ✓ What irritates you?
- ✓ How would a friend describe you?
- ✓ What is your greatest strength? Weakness?
- ✓ How do you feel about your family?
- ✓ If you were starting college again, what would you do differently?
- ✓ Tell me about your home life when you were growing up.
- ✓ Who are your best friends?
- ✓ Have you ever changed your major field of interest?
- ✓ Will you fight to get ahead? Are you competitive?
- ✓ Do you demand attention?
- ✓ What would be your ideal job?
- ✓ Do you have an analytical mind?
- ✓ What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

**How much will you cost us?**

- ✓ What are your expectations in terms of salary?
- ✓ How much money do you hope to earn at age \_\_\_?
- ✓ Do you have plans for graduate work?
- ✓ What types of employers/positions are you interviewing with/for?

**EXAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER**

- ✓ What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
- ✓ Could you describe a typical first-year assignment?
- ✓ What is a normal working day like in this position?
- ✓ What is the most important responsibility in this position? How have people in this job allocated their time?
- ✓ To whom would I report? What is their style as a supervisor? How much contact would I have with him/her?
- ✓ If I'm hired, who are the people I'd be working with directly? Can I meet some of them?
- ✓ Could you tell me about your initial and future training programs?
- ✓ What are some typical career paths followed by others who have been in this position? What is a realistic time frame for advancement?
- ✓ What kind of training program do you have?
- ✓ How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- ✓ What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- ✓ What are the most challenging facets of the position?
- ✓ What are your expectations for new hires?
- ✓ What is the overall structure of the department where the position will be located?
- ✓ What is the work environment like?
- ✓ How often can I expect to relocate during the initial years of employment with your company?
- ✓ What are the organization's plans for future growth?
- ✓ Is the organization stable and financially sound?
- ✓ Is it company policy to promote from within? What is the work history of your top management?
- ✓ What distinguishes you from your competitors?
- ✓ What industry-wide trends are likely to affect your organization?
- ✓ What are your company's strengths and weaknesses?
- ✓ How much travel will be required?
- ✓ What kind of schedule would I work?
- ✓ Does the company provide any educational benefits?
- ✓ What is the dress code here?
- ✓ How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
- ✓ How is the work environment affected by the company's management style?
- ✓ If you were to name three values this organization represents, what would they be?
- ✓ Why should I want to work for your organization instead of another?
- ✓ Why did you join and stay with this firm?
- ✓ What do you like about working for this organization? What don't you like?

**ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- ✓ Age
- ✓ Date of birth
- ✓ Birthplace
- ✓ Ethnic background
- ✓ Religious beliefs
- ✓ Native language
- ✓ Maiden name
- ✓ Marital status
- ✓ Date of marriage
- ✓ Whether or not your spouse is employed
- ✓ How much your spouse earns
- ✓ Whether or not you are pregnant
- ✓ Number of dependent children living with you
- ✓ To explain all gaps in your employment record (in order to ascertain if you have taken time off to have children)
- ✓ Whether or not you have any physical or emotional defects (An employer can ask whether you have any handicaps which would prevent you from performing the job.)

Source: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission