

Interview Survival Guide

Hobart and William Smith Colleges
The Salisbury *Center for Career Services*
Trinity Hall, 1st Floor
(315) 781-3514

THIS PACKET PROVIDES INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS

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- 2. Interview Research & Getting Ready Before the Day**
- 3. Arriving and Meeting the Interviewer**
- 4. The Stages of the Employment Interview**
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(Answering Questions and Asking Questions)**

1. Overview and Types of Interviews

The interview is a “two-way conversation” with a two-fold purpose:

1. The employer gains information about your strengths/skills and background and how they add value to the organization
2. You, the candidate, gain a better understanding of both the position and the organization in determining if there is a match with your needs and goals. There are several variations of interviews but most will include elements of the **General/Situational** and **Behavioral** types.

• General or Situational Interview

Employers ask questions about your academic and career experiences--they make connections between them and the requirements for the position. Employers will ask you to elaborate on experiences from your resume. They will also ask you how you see your skills/background meeting the position requirements. They will evaluate your answers on both content and presentation.

• Behavioral Interview

Most managers, recruiters and human resource professionals have been trained to conduct a behavioral interview. The basic premise of the behavioral interview is that **past and present behavior is the best predictor of future behavior**. Therefore, the interviewer structures a discussion in order obtain specific, behavioral examples from the candidate.

Notice the difference between the **general** vs. the **behavioral** question in the following examples:

General Question: How are you at managing deadlines?

Behavioral Question: Give me a specific example of a time when you had to meet an important deadline. What specifically did you do in order to meet it?

General Question: How would you describe your team building skills?

Behavioral Question: Describe for me a work situation in which you developed a team. What specifically did you do? How did you concretely deal with the challenges you encountered in your team building effort?

Interview Tip

It is advantageous to answer questions in behavioral terms, even if the interviewer is not conducting a formal behavioral interview. You may want to use some of the language from the job description in describing your skills and accomplishments.

3. Other types of interviews include:

• Case Interview

A case interview is an analysis of a business issue, which tests your problem-solving abilities. The interviewer will present you with a business problem and ask you for your perspective. Employers use these interviews as a way of assessing your analytical and creative thinking as well as your demeanor under pressure. A successful response to a “case question” is more about how you approach the issue or problem and less about a specific answer.

• **Second or Final Round Interview**

Before making an offer, employers usually have candidates back for a second round of interviews often involving multiple interviewers. Questions are typically more in-depth and will be focused on how your skills, knowledge and experiences add value to their organization—beyond the position for which you are being considered. Usually, 3-5 candidates are given 2nd or final round interviews before a decision is made. It is important to have a few different examples prepared as you answer the same or similar questions from multiple interviews. Same advice goes for having multiple questions to ask. The Final Round interviews also focus more on your “fit” with the organization and its culture as well as your value over the longer term.

• **Group or Panel Interview**

As part of a second round or final day of interviewing, some organizations will build in a group or panel interview. This is an opportunity for the organization to evaluate your ability to think “on your feet” and interact in a group situation. Preparation for this type of interview is the same as for any interview in that you still need to have your content for typical questions you’ll be asked—and for the questions you will ask—prepared beforehand. The difference is in the presentation. Your challenge is to make eye contact with each member of the group as you are speaking. This needs to be accomplished in a relaxed and confident manner—not easy for most people. Additionally, you need to be sure you are not excluding anyone—and look at everyone approximately the same amount of time. The group or panel interview is also an opportunity for you to demonstrate how you can “build” conversation and discussion based on what group members are saying.

EXAMPLE:

Interviewer A--Mr. Todd: “In your role as event manager for the Plays in the Park Summer Series, it must have been stressful to know it was your job to “fill the seats”--- when not one ticket had been sold one week before opening night.” “How did you handle that?”

Your response: “I did feel the pressure, but also knew I had a good team around me. We met several times and developed an outstanding strategy for publicizing the Plays through a variety of print and web resources.”

Interviewer B--Ms. Smith: “It would be helpful if you could talk about the larger role you played as event manager for the Plays in the Park series last summer.

Your discussion building response: “I’d be glad to—one additional comment however to Mr. Todd’s question—which also relates to your question. Managing pressure was the key challenge for this position—not just in terms of sales and marketing—but other responsibilities including set design, dealing with daily scheduling problems and several budget issues.....”

2. Research and Getting Ready

Researching the organization before the interview is necessary—and it results in a more productive discussion between you and the interviewer. **You should not go into an interview without a clear understanding of the job. Always obtain a position description as well as web or print information on the employer.** The employer’s website will help you gain an understanding of other posted positions, special programs, services, processes and characteristics of the organization, which contribute to their unique culture. It is also advantageous to understand where their products and services rank in the marketplace and how they gain a competitive advantage over other organizations.

Resources for employer information include:

- Hoover's (<http://www.hoovers.com/free>)
 - Provides comprehensive company information.
- US Securities and Exchange Commission (<http://www.sec.gov>)
 - Government website that houses all of the required filings for publicly traded companies.

- UW Systems or UWM On-Line Libraries - Check the Lexis-Nexis Database (<http://www.lexis-nexis.com>)
-Provides current news articles about business and companies.
- Both **VAULT** (<http://www.vault.com/>) and **WetFeet** (<http://www.wetfeet.com/asp/home.asp>)
Provide *insider* profiles on major corporations and emphasize information, ideas and intelligence, which make the organization unique. There is a charge for the profiles or guides but the information is unlike anything found on a free site. VAULT also has message boards where you can read comments from employees and people who have gone through the recruiting process. Researching beyond the website through industry reports, competitive analyses, and business and professional journals/websites will give you a deeper level of information.

Pre-Interview Tips

- Activate your network---find out whom you know that knows something about the company, job or person with whom you are interviewing.
- Be sure you know exactly who you are to see, the location, date and time.
- It is permissible to contact the office to get the exact name and title of the interviewer.
- Determine how you will get there – how long will it take? **Map Quest** is great for this—but double-checking with someone who knows the location is also advisable.
- Decide what to wear – look like you are ready to step into the job. If in doubt, be conservative. Check out what current employees wear. Suits for both men and women are always appropriate. Minimal jewelry, minimal makeup for women is the rule.
- Prepare your responses to questions for the interviewer – write them down. Two things usually happen if you have not written down answers or bulleted points for answers before the interview—both bad. **Most candidates will say either too much or too little. Your goal is a 1 ½ --2 minute response, depending on the question.** Your response will be sometimes longer if asked to describe a complex issue or situation.
- Prepare your questions. Always have 2-3 well-researched and thoughtful questions prepared. Never ask about salary, benefits or anything easily answered on their website.
- Review your resume as part of preparation—there is nothing worse than being asked to elaborate on an experience and you are unable to do so.
- Take along extra resume copies, a list of references, plus the name, address and telephone number of the interviewer. The latter is invaluable in case you are running late. Never be late—but if something should cause you to be late, always call, apologize, explain your circumstances and let the interviewer know how late you will be.

3. Arriving and Meeting the Interviewer

It is trite but true—you never get a second chance to make a first impression. How you are perceived in the first few minutes can influence both the start as well as the outcome of the interview. Research shows that if a first impression is very positive, then you have to make serious errors throughout the interview to wind up with a poor performance. Conversely, if you start poorly, you have to work extra hard to make it up throughout the interview. Other suggestions include:

- **Be on time – be on time – be on time!** And even better, be early. Getting there early allows you to practice some relaxation techniques, deep breathing, or positive visual imagery before you actually go into the interviewing room. It is helpful to find a space (e.g. a park if the weather is nice; nearby a coffee shop or bench in the main lobby) to sit, relax and go over some final points.
- Check your appearance in the restroom. Do not check your appearance or apply makeup, comb hair etc. in the waiting room.
- Take a breath mint—do not--do not chew gum!
- Find the receptionist and present yourself with confidence....”Hi, I’m Tom Lopez and I’m here to see Ms Davis for a 2:30 interview.”
- When taken to office or interviewer comes out, remember your body language – eye contact, smile, firm (not bone crushing) handshake, maintain relaxed but erect posture.
- Observe the interviewer. Is he or she relaxed, nervous, friendly, hurried, and disorganized? If hurried or disorganized, you may have to take extra measures to be calm, confident and insure that your strengths and accomplishments come out in the interview.

4. STAGES OF THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW

Most employment interviews can be divided into 5 stages:

1. Greeting
2. Information from the employer (not all the time)
3. Light questions
4. Connecting questions
5. Your questions

1. Greeting and chitchat—they are important because they are a part of your first impression.

Greetings are what you would expect:

“How are you today?”

“Did you have any trouble parking?”

“How was the traffic on 94?”

“How’s the weather out there?”

Keep your responses brief—but have some idea on how you will handle them beforehand

2. Information from the Employer Background about the position and organization is sometimes provided by the interviewer. Even though you probably know this through your research, many interviewers cannot resist telling you about the opportunity. Hopefully, they keep it under 3 minutes. S/he may ask, “Would you like me to tell you something about the opportunity?” You do not automatically have to say “yes”. It is acceptable and even at times preferable, to say something like, “I believe I’m pretty knowledgeable about the job; the focus is customer service and I’ve done that exceptionally well for two different major companies. I

also know that ABC is the industry leader in most mid-to mid/high consumer lines and have studied about your Team and Associate focused culture. If there are specifics about the position which are critical to performance—I'd very much like to hear them.”

3. Light Questions These are “ice breaking” and intended to get the conversation started in a non-stressful way. Examples include:

- “So tell me why you picked UWM and how do you like it?”
- “How do you like your professors in Biology? “Do you have a favorite?”
- “You grew up in Green Bay—what was that like?”
- “Your 3.6 GPA is impressive—tell me about your success in the classroom.”

4. Connecting Questions This is where you need to make the sale. Your skills, background and objective must connect to the job requirements and add value to the organization. Questions can include:

- “Your internship looks challenging—how do you see what you learned there being relevant to this job?”
- “Well, you’ve obviously been a leader at UWM—how will that specifically help you in this position?”
- “Tell me why we should make you the offer---what will you bring to the job that others won’t?”

5. Your Questions Do not miss this final opportunity to distinguish yourself. **Never say—“I don’t have any questions—you answered them during the interview.”** And do not ask about salary or fringe benefits—your questions need to show professional curiosity and research—and reinforce that you are the best candidate for the position.

10. QUESTIONS YOU ASK THE EMPLOYER

1. What is the main challenge of this position? What separates the outstanding performers from the average?
2. What financial, personal and professional incentives are there for exceeding job performance expectations in this position?
3. Can you tell me about a recent outstanding hire for this position and the qualities she or he had?
4. What programs are there in the organization that will help me set job performance goals, achieve them and support me in the process?
5. How important is life-work balance in this organization, and what are some examples or illustrations?
6. What are some suggestions you would make for answering the question (name one specific one) in the on-line applicant system for your organization?
7. My coursework and college experiences are pretty well set so with only one semester to go before graduation, what can I do to make myself even more qualified for this position.
8. What personal skills or qualities are most important in advancing up the career ladder in your organization?
9. What 2-3 key resources could I access which would help me to learn more about this field and be successful in this job?
10. What technology competencies are most important for me to have in advancing my career with your organization?

Interview Tip

You may be asked at the end of the interview... “Would you like to add anything else about yourself which will help me better understand your qualifications?” A concise response like the following is helpful... “Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you; I’ve learned more about the position and ABC Corporation.....and believe my leadership with the clubs I’ve started and academic success in my Communications major provide a great match for your requirements. I look forward to a possible follow-up interview---could you tell me what the process looks like beyond today?”

5. 50 CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Many of these questions (or variations of them) will come up in almost every interview. Going over them; writing down 2-3 bulleted points for each one; insuring you have specific, concrete examples and evidence for each one is the very best way to begin preparing for interviews. Then, practice them; the key is to strike the right balance between concise, well-articulated answers and a spontaneous, friendly yet business-like tone. Most questions should take 1-3 minutes and include 2-3 focused points. Always give examples and evidence to back up your points.

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. What do you know about our organization?
3. What value would you bring to this position? What can you do for us that someone else cannot?
4. Why should we hire you?
5. What are you looking for in a career?
6. Using your own words, please give your definition of the position for which you are being interviewed.
7. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to this organization?
8. How long would you stay with this company?
9. How would you react if I said you might be over qualified or too experienced for the position?
10. Tell me why you could become an effective manager or supervisor?
11. What do you see as the most difficult challenge of this position?
12. Who is your favorite and least favorite professor...tell me why?
13. Describe a project you did for a course and what you learned in your own personal career planning?
14. Describe what you believe to be an ideal work environment.
15. How would you evaluate your education and your work in college?
16. Name a job you have had and tell me how you made a real difference there.
17. Tell me about a time when you worked with a budget or finances.
18. What would your co-workers say about you?
19. In your current or last position, what tasks did you like the most? Least?
20. In your current or last position, what are or were your two most significant accomplishments?
21. Why haven't you found a new position yet?
22. If you could start college over again, what might you do differently?
23. What kind of boss do you like?—and tell me how that influences your work.

24. Please describe a situation in which your work was criticized?
25. If I spoke with your previous boss, what would he/she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
26. Tell me if and how you work under pressure and tight deadlines.
27. In your present position, what problems have you identified that had previously been overlooked?
28. If you had your choice of jobs and companies, what would you choose?
29. What are your salary expectations if we offer this position to you?
30. Why do you want to work for us?
31. Leadership can be defined in many ways—how have you been a leader either on or off campus?
32. Tell me about some of the schools you were considering besides HWS....why did you choose HWS?
33. What has been the best thing about going to school here...the worst?
34. What other types of positions and companies are you considering?
35. Describe some things you have done to stay at the leading edge of your field.
36. What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended, etc.?
37. How would you respond if I offered you this position right now?
38. How would you describe your own personality?
39. Are you a leader? Give examples.
40. What would be your first move if you obtained this position?
41. What are your strong points? What are your weak points?
42. How do you see your career path developing over the next 5 years?
43. Tell me about a situation where you were in the middle of a conflict—how did it come out?
44. According to your definition of success, how successful have you been so far?
45. What has been the toughest assignment in a class or job you ever had and how did you handle it?
46. Have you ever hired anybody?--what do you look for when you hire someone?
47. How would you describe the “culture” at HWS?
48. What makes you want to work hard?
49. Describe for me the process you went through to choose a major.
50. What do you know about our company?

6. EXAMPLES OF GOOD REPLIES

Note: A majority of these responses are for positions requiring more than entry-level experience. If you are interviewing for entry-level positions, use them for ideas and frameworks for your individualized responses.

Q: What are your key skills?

A: *After working six years as a senior systems analyst, I have developed a number of key skills, including business modeling, process re-engineering, software package evaluation, and excellent programming skills in UNIX and C environments. I was very pleased to discover that these are the skills you are seeking. Do you want to hear about specific examples of my work?*

Talk about your key skills and how you will use them in this job. Avoid clichés or generalities. Offer specific evidence, drawing parallels from your current or previous job to the job you are interviewing for.

Q: Tell me about a time you did not perform to your capabilities.

A: *The first time I had to give a presentation to our board, I failed to anticipate some of their questions. I was unprepared for anything other than what I wanted to report. Now my director and I brainstorm all the what-ifs in advance.*

This question forces the candidate to describe a negative situation. Do so in the context of an early career mistake based on inexperience; then demonstrate the better judgment you now have because of that learning experience.

Q: How do you regroup when things haven't gone as planned?

A: *I start by trying to imagine the worst possible outcome; then I back up and identify precautions I can take to avoid that scenario. In this way, I usually end up with a result close to the original goal. The training example I described earlier is proof of that skill.* Describe a time when some obstacle forced you to change your original plan, but you were still able to achieve the desired result. Did you rally the support of others to make this happen? With hindsight, how might you have better predicted the obstacle?

Q: What accomplishment was the most difficult for you to achieve?

A: *I found it intimidating to work with the marketing-research staff when I started my job, mostly because I had not done well in statistics or market research during college. What I decided to do was enroll in an executive seminar on market research, which really boosted my confidence. Now I do not feel at a disadvantage when I meet with the research group, and I know what questions to ask to get information that is meaningful to me.*

Describe something you have accomplished despite obstacles, lack of training, or inadequate experience. This question allows you to talk about overcoming a weakness.

Q: Tell me about a project in which you were disappointed with your personal performance.

A: *In my last job for a manufacturing company, I had to analyze all of the supplier bids and present recommendations to the vice president of logistics. Because the supplier bids were not in a uniform format, my analysis often consisted of comparing dissimilar items. This caused some confusion in my final report, and by the time I reworked it and presented it to the vice president, we had lost the critical time we needed to improve our approval process for these bids. In hindsight, I should have taken a simpler approach to the problem and not tried to make it so complex or all-inclusive. Ever since, I have paid more attention to making recommendations in a timely manner.*

Describe roadblocks and what you have done to try to get around them. How have your skills come into play? In hindsight, what could you have done differently? What lessons have you learned?

Q: What would you do if I told you that I thought you were giving a poor interview today?

A: *Well, the first thing I would do is ask you if there was any specific part of the interview that you thought I might have mishandled. After that, I would think back and try to remember if there had been any faulty communication on my part. Then I would try to review possible problems I had understanding your questions, and I would ask for clarification if I needed it. Finally, if we had time, I would try to respond more fully and appropriately, to the problem areas you identified for me.*

Interviewers like to ask stress questions like these to see how well you hold up under pressure. Your best bet is to stay calm and relaxed; do not allow your confidence to be shaken.

Q: What aspects of your work are most often criticized?

A: I remember in my first job as marketing assistant I spend endless hours analyzing a particular problem. I came up with a revised marketing plan that was extremely well received. Unfortunately, when it came time to present the plan to top management, I had not prepared the fine points of the presentation – overheads and slides – and the proposal was turned down. I'd failed to make clear savings that would result from the plan. I spent the next two weeks working on my presentation, and on my second try, management approved it, and my recommendations were carried out to everyone's satisfaction.

This question is similar to the question on weaknesses. Try to give an example from an early job. Discuss what you did to overcome the situation and to improve your work. You could also discuss how the failure has inspired you to pay more careful attention to detail in all your work.

Q: Tell me about a time when your employer was not happy with your job performance.

A: That would be during my first week on the job as a paralegal. I have her two letters that had typos in them. Frankly, I had simply been a little sloppy – but that is the only example that comes to mind. Ms. Heilman did tell me regularly that she was very happy with my work.

Again, be sure to discuss a relatively minor incident here. Also, show a willingness to accept responsibility for the problem – do not blame others or make excuses. Simply describe what happened and how you successfully resolved the situation.

Q: Sell me this stapler.

A: This is a professional-quality stapler, designed to be functional as well as attractive. It will help you reduce clutter on your desk by enabling you to fasten pages together. And since papers relating to the same subject will not be attached, you will be more efficient and will save time searching for papers. Finally, its sleek shape and black color are coordinated to match the rest of your office furniture.

With this kind of question, the interviewer will want to determine how quickly you think on your feet, as well as your ability to communicate effectively and succinctly. Be prepared to give a thirty-second speech on the benefits and advantages of virtually any common office object, from a paper clip to a telephone, particularly if you are interviewing for a sales position.

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: I am a production assistant with a B. A. in communications and three years of solid broadcasting and public-relations experience. I have extensive experience developing and researching topics, pre-interviewing guests, and producing on-location video tapings. I have a tremendous amount of energy and love to be challenged. I am constantly trying to take on additional responsibilities and learn new things. I have been watching your station for some time now, and I have been impressed with your innovative approach and your fast growth. I'd like to be a part of that winning team.

This is a perfect opportunity to sell your qualifications to the interviewer. Using the sixty-second pitch you developed in chapter 1 as a guideline, briefly describe your experience, skills and accomplishments, goals and personal qualities. Explain your interest in the company you are interviewing with and how you plan on making a contribution there. If you are a recent college graduate, be sure to discuss your educational qualifications as well, emphasizing the specific classes you took that are relevant to the position.

Q: What is your biggest weakness?

A: I admit to be a bit of a perfectionist. I take a great deal of pride in my work and am committed to producing the highest-quality work I can. Sometimes if I am not careful, though, I can go a bit overboard. I have learned that it is not always possible or even practical to try to perfect your work – sometimes you have to decide what is important and ignore the rest in order to be productive. It is a question of trade-offs. I also pay a lot of attention to pacing my work so that I am not too caught up in perfecting every detail.

This is a great example of what is known as a negative question. Negative questions are a favorite among interviewers, because they are effective for uncovering problems or weaknesses. The key to answering negative questions is to give them a positive spin. For this particular question, your best bet is to admit to a weakness that is not catastrophic, inconsistent, or currently disruptive to your chosen professional field, and to emphasize how you have overcome or minimized the problem. Whatever you do, do not answer this question with a copout like “I can’t think of any,” or even worse, “I don’t really have any major weaknesses.” This kind of response is likely to eliminate you from contention.

7. ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Q: What religion do you practice?

Answer 1: *I make it a point not to mix my personal beliefs with my work, if that is what you mean. I assure you that I value my career too much for that*

Answer 2: *I am not quite sure I understand what you are getting at. Would you please explain to me how this issue is relevant to the position?*

Answer 3: *That question makes me uncomfortable. I would really rather not answer it.*

Q: How old are you?

Answer 1: *I am in my fifties and have over thirty years of experience in this industry. My area of expertise is in...*

Answer 2: *I am too young to retire, but I’m old enough to know better than to answer a question like that.*

Answer 3: *I am not quite sure I understand what you are getting at. Would you please explain to me how this issue is relevant to this position?*

Answer 4: *That question makes me uncomfortable. I would really rather not answer it.*

Q Are you married?

Q. Do you have children?

Q. Do you plan to have children?

Q. Are you a US Citizen?

Q. Do you have a permanent resident visa?

Legal Q. What is your authorization to work in this country?

APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Instructions: Below are four frequently asked interview questions. Use this sheet to develop a narrative consisting of 2-4 bulleted points for each one. Be sure to incorporate the use of “skill verbs” using the following page. Skill verbs create pictures of you performing tasks and accomplishing objectives, which the interviewer connects to job requirements.

1. “Tell me about yourself.”

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-
-
-

2. “Tell me about your primary strengths.”

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-

3. “Name a weakness you have and how do you compensate for it?”

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-
-
-

4. “Help me better understand how your skills and background will be of value in this position and organization.”

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-
-
-

APPENDIX B

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT / “COMMERCIAL”

The personal statement or commercial is **“a must have”** in your job search arsenal. You will need it in many employment, networking and recruitment situations. **It is a 1-2 minute statement to let others know.....who you are....what you do well....and what you are looking for in a career or job.**

First impressions are critical—and with a well prepared personal statement, you are letting employers, managers, colleagues and contacts know that you are confident and clear about where you are going and the contributions you can make to an organization. It is all part of the “game.” Few students know exactly where they are heading career wise or how they can specifically add value to a company--but it is critical to convey that message early and throughout the employment interview/communications process.

As you move ahead in the process, you will gather intelligence about the job and the organization as well as picking up cues how they feel about you. And you will start to know if it is a good “match” for you—as well for the employer. But at the beginning, your personal statement needs to be...**specific...concise...memorable.**

The Personal Statement will help you:

- Introduce yourself in social or networking situations
- Begin the interview with a strong foundation when asked “Tell me about yourself.”
- Approach employers at a career day or job fair

EXAMPLES

• “My name is Barry Xiong; I’m a sophomore in Letters & Science at UWM, majoring in English. I enjoy writing and have two articles on the web. I have had two great courses in the Communications Department, which have challenged me to write more clarity and conciseness. I believe in the power of the written word and want to also work on my public speaking and group presentation skills. I’m excited about the possibility of an internship where I can contribute to either the public relations or marketing functions of a major Fortune 1000 company. I’m still exploring--- but I think I could be very successful in a fast-paced, large corporate environment.”

• Hello—I am Tim Hernandez, I am graduating in December with a 3.2 GPA and a double major Sociology and Psychology at UWM. I have been very active in several volunteer capacities including Habitat for Humanity, cancer and diabetes walk-a thons and the Center for Volunteerism and Leadership. My career goal is a challenging client services role –and eventual advancement to management in community services. I’m interested in entry-level opportunities with a non-profit organization concerned with helping people solve personal challenges—and raise the quality of their lives in Milwaukee. I also want to pursue an MSW or MBA –depending on which would be most valuable for my career path.

WRITE YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT /“COMMERCIAL”

Who you are: _____

What you do well: _____

What you are looking for: _____

What contribution you will make - Value you add: _____

FINAL COMMERCIAL

APPENDIX C

P.A.R. (Problem. Action. Result)

PAR (Problem, Action, Result) or STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) are helpful “formula’s for planning your answers to interview questions. Make copies of the worksheet and write out descriptions of specific problems you have solved or situations handled. The benefits from this approach are twofold: 1.Helping the employer see how your skills were used and valuable; 2. Providing proof, evidence and the “business case” for how you can make a difference in a work related situation.

The % guidelines are for amount of time you will generally spend speaking about each part of your problem or situation.

PROBLEM/SITUATION/TASK 15-20%

ACTION (what you did... how you did it) 70%

RESULT (measurable outcome, what happened? impact?) 5-10%

PROBLEM/SITUATION/TASK _____

ACTION _____

RESULTS _____

APPENDIX D

USING EMPLOYER INFORMATION FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

Knowledge of the employer and position for which you are applying is crucial, but it is only the first step in preparing for a successful interview. The central accomplishment here is knowing how to integrate this information into your interview without sounding as if you are simply relaying or “preaching” memorized facts.

The objective for using website and print resources is to identify information which you find interesting and from which you can “frame” some answers and questions. The trick is not to impress employers with knowledge—but rather use the information in a way, which demonstrates your curiosity and sincerity about learning more about the organization.

Example of poorly using information:

“I see where your market-share dropped last quarter—can you tell me why and what strategies are in place to get back to your previous industry leading position?”

Example of translating information to intelligence and making a favorable impression:

“I understand that the industry is moving towards new technology to better track outsourcing for government procurement—could you talk about some of the advantages of this technology for your company—and which software vendors appear to have the best product?”

USING INFORMATION IN ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Most of the questions you will be asked in an interview will relate the job functions described in the position description. You are not being tested on how well you have memorized the information about the organization. Using the information you have researched, however, there are ways to show how your skills and background meet the employer’s needs. Most interview questions can be answered in three to four statements (1-3 minutes) if you have thought about the points you want to make beforehand. Some examples:

Question:

“Why do you want to work for this company?”

Response:

“As I understand the position, there is an opportunity to be involved in the both the planning of marketing strategies and the actual selling of the product. Besides using my communication skills and knowledge of chemicals in direct selling, I believe I am creative in designing marketing strategies. The product launch team I headed for our Small Business Association assignment exceeded our sales forecasts.”

Question:

“I see you’re involved with the Latin America Culture Club. What did you learn from that experience?”

Response:

“As an officer for the Latin America Culture Club, I was responsible for organizing a display on Hispanic literature for the university-wide Multi-Cultural Fair we sponsored. Most of my correspondence with the publishing houses was done in Spanish and I feel this experience added new business-related competencies to my fluency. I would feel very confident communicating with your Central American customers on the quality control issues mentioned on your website.”

Question:

“What courses did you like best?”

Response:

“I enjoyed my Sociology of Learning class the most. During one in a series of field trips, I observed first-hand some of the problems in a rural day care center. That experience confirmed for me that this type of setting.....and working with children with special needs is how I want to begin my career.”

USING INFORMATION IN ASKING QUESTIONS

One of the worst things you can do in an interview is to NOT ask thoughtful questions at the end. You will almost always have that opportunity. There are effective ways to use the knowledge you have gained about the position or organization and integrate it into your questions. **As in using this knowledge in answering questions, you will be translating the knowledge to *intelligence* in the interview.**

From Print or Web Research:

“After about 12-15 months from the time you begin your career with us, if you’ve demonstrated your ability, you’ll be ready for promotion to Merchandising Manager. Your increased responsibility will include larger sales volume and a number of sales associates reporting to you.”

Questions

“I understand that after 12-15 months of training, promotion to Merchandising Manager is a possibility...”

- ...could you talk about the criteria and methods by which trainees are evaluated?”
- ...what kinds of communication channels are used between the trainees and the supervisors during the evaluation period?”
- ...what is the major quality or accomplishment that distinguishes those who are promoted from those who are not?”

From Print or Web Research:

“Today’s large Store Manager usually has gained experience in district or regional staff work.”

Question:

“In viewing some of the background that your large store managers have in district or regional staff work, could you describe some of their responsibilities.....and their primary challenge in making the transition from staff to management?”

From Print or Web Information:

“At Evergreen, sales success translates to both personal recognition and generous financial rewards based totally on the results of your day-to-day efforts. Opportunities to be creative and resourceful in advancing our product exposure to a wide variety of people and market environments is also integral to your work. A sales career can offer all this and more...”

Questions:

- “What are some of examples of how employees are personally rewarded in a large dynamic company like Evergreen?”
- “Could you give an example of a situation where one of your top Sales people demonstrated initiative and creativity when serving a client?”

Examples of Poor Questions:

1. “Tell me about your training program.” (Too general—shows you did not do your homework.)
2. “At what salary level would I be if I progress to Step 3 in my second year with the company?” (Shows your concern is money and not contribution you can make.)
3. “Could you explain your fringe benefits package?” (Standard, boring question- need to be more specific.)
4. “I noticed that on the second half of last year, your dividends dropped 2 points-was that due to your plants closing in Winnebago County or just the general economy?” (Sounds critical and you are showing off. The question is a bit technical for most interviewers. A better question would be... “Could you discuss a few of the business and political issues regarding the plant that closed in Winnebago County?”)