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This chapter is dedicated to something that will be of great importance throughout your professional life—interviews. An **interview** is a goal-driven transaction characterized by questions and answers, clear structure, control, and imbalance. An interview is usually a dyadic transaction, meaning that it takes place between two people. A talk show host asking questions of a celebrity would be one example of a dyadic interview. Sometimes, however, a person may be interviewed by two or more people or in a panel situation. Consider, for instance, when someone testifies before Congress and is asked a series of questions by a panel of senators. We will introduce various types of interviews in this chapter, but we will primarily focus on employment interviews, since those are the types of interviews the majority of people reading this book are most concerned about at this point in their lives.

Interviews share many characteristics with other types of communication. Certainly, all of the properties of communication discussed throughout the book remain intact. Communication within an interview is transactional and symbolic (both verbal and nonverbal), requires meaning, is both presentational and representational, and takes much for granted. An interview requires effective listening (engaged, relational, and critical) on the part of everyone involved in order to be successful. Furthermore, identity, relational, and cultural work are all being conducted during an interview. There are certain characteristics, though, that make interviews very unique types of communication, and we will examine those later.

This chapter ultimately focuses on how to conduct and participate in employment interviews. We begin by discussing the preparation for an interview. We then examine what must take place during the beginning of an interview. Next, we explore what happens during the question-and-answer portion of an interview. From an interviewer standpoint, we discuss developing different types of questions, sequencing the questions, directive and nondirective questioning, and avoiding illegal questions. From an interviewee standpoint, we discuss adjusting the interview frame for greater success, learning from successful and unsuccessful interviews, answering common interview questions, and handling illegal questions. We then examine what must take place during the conclusion of an interview. We next discuss the responsibilities of interviewers and interviewees following an interview. Finally, since most people will not be invited to interview with an organization without an effective cover letter and résumé, we will discuss the construction of these vital application tools.

Focus Questions



- What are the characteristics of an interview?
- What are the types of interviews?
- What are the pre-interview responsibilities of interviewers and interviewees?
- How should a person begin an employment interview?
- What types of questions and questioning styles may an interviewer utilize?
- How should interviewers respond to questions during an interview?
- How should a person conclude an employment interview?
- What are the post-interview responsibilities of interviewers and interviewees?
- What are a cover letter and a résumé?

Characteristics of an Interview

Interviews encompass unique characteristics that distinguish them from other types of communication. In what follows, we will examine five characteristics of interviews: (1) goal driven, (2) question-answer, (3) structured, (4) controlled, and (5) unbalanced.

Goal-Driven

Interviews are generally more *goal-driven* than other types of communication, especially those taking place between two people. All communication achieves something beyond the simple exchange of symbols, but these achievements and creations are not always purposeful and intended. Interviews have a clear purpose, a goal to be achieved. Information may be desired, a problem may need resolved, persuasion may be desired, someone may need assistance with a personal problem, or an employer may be seeking the best person for a job opening and a potential employee may be looking for a good employer.

Question-Answer

Another characteristic of interviews is the *question-answer* nature of the transaction. The majority of an interview consists of one person (sometimes more than one) asking questions and another person answering those questions. Everyday communication includes occasional questions and answers—especially if people are getting to know one another—but not to the extent of an interview. Furthermore, in most everyday communication, one person will usually not be in charge of asking the questions and the other person in charge of answering them.

Structured

Interviews also tend to be more *structured* than other types of communication. Whereas a casual interaction between two people may happen spontaneously and have no clear focus, interviews involve planning and preparation and also tend to have a clear sequence. Certain actions are expected during an interview in order to reach the clearly defined goal discussed previously. We will write more about the planning and sequence of interviews later in the chapter.

Controlled

Interviews are generally *controlled* by an interviewer, who is responsible for moving the interview toward its intended goal. The amount of control exerted during an interview depends on this goal, which is achieved in part by the questions asked and the communication environment established. Once again, this is a topic we will discuss in more detail later in the chapter, specifically whether an interview is characterized as *directive* or *nondirective*.

Unbalanced

A final characteristic of interviews is that the time spent talking by an interviewee and an interviewer is usually *unbalanced*. Typically, an interviewer will speak for 30% of the time, and an interviewee will speak for 70% of the time. Of course, the type of interview will dictate exactly how much time each party spends talking, but more often than not, an interviewee will talk more and an interviewer will talk less.

Types of Interviews

Now that we have discussed the characteristics of an interview, we can examine various types of interviews. You may have already experienced some of these interviews in the past and will likely encounter them many times throughout both your personal life your professional life in the future. We will begin with the employment interview, since this type of interview will receive the most attention in the remainder of the chapter. Note that the first three types of interviews discussed encompass the workplace. Initial employment is not the only place you will come across interviews in your professional life.

Employment Interviews

When people think of interviews, an employment interview is probably what comes immediately to mind. **Employment interviews** are those in which a potential employer interviews a potential employee. Both parties have a great deal riding on the success of an interview. The potential employee is not only seeking employment but also determining whether the job is one that would be accepted if offered. The potential employer is searching not only for a qualified applicant but also for someone who would actually benefit the organization. Potential employers also want to convince potential employees that the position is one they should accept if offered.

Performance Interviews

Also known as *performance reviews*, **performance interviews** are those in which an individual's activities and work are discussed. These interviews are most often conducted between employees and supervisors, but you may also experience them in educational and other settings. For instance, students frequently discuss their progress toward a degree with an advisor or perhaps even a committee of professors. In both situations, a person's strengths and weaknesses are discussed with the ultimate goal being to improve his or her performance. Naturally such interviews can be stressful, but they can also provide people with valuable information that can be used to strengthen their performance and to help them achieve personal and professional goals. These interviews are also an opportunity for the goals and culture of an organization to be reinforced.

Exit Interviews

Make Your Case



Do exit interviews provide accurate and useful information to employers? Or will employees leaving an organization still hesitate to provide full disclosure of the positive and negative aspects of the organization? What factors may determine whether an exit interview will be worthwhile?

Exit interviews are those that occur when a person chooses to leave a place of employment. The conventional wisdom is that someone who is leaving may be more likely to provide honest answers about organizational cultures, policies, supervisors, compensation, and other aspects of the workplace. If used correctly, these interviews can provide employers with valuable insight that can be incorporated to improve employee satisfaction and thus the productivity and success of an organization. These interviews are also increasingly common in education and among multiple types of groups, such as volunteer organizations.

Information-Gaining Interviews

You may have previously experienced an information-gaining interview and not even realized it as such. **Information-gaining interviews** are those in which a person solicits information from another person. You have likely responded to surveys, which is one form of information-gaining interview. A doctor asking you about your symptoms during an office visit would be another example of this form of interview. You may conduct information-gaining interviews when preparing speeches and papers for school or work. These sorts of interviews are also frequently seen on Webcasts and included in newspapers, magazines, and blogs.

Persuasive Interviews

Persuasive interviews are those that have influence as the ultimate goal. The interviewer may appear to be gaining information but is actually attempting to influence the thoughts or actions of the interviewee. This form of interview may sound a bit manipulative and perhaps underhanded, but it is quite common. When salespeople ask your opinion about a product or service, they often do so in a way that attempts to sway you toward what they want you to purchase. At other times, what appears to be a survey is in reality an attempt to persuade. Political workers have frequently been accused of dirty tricks under the guise of conducting straightforward surveys. They attempt to plant a seed of doubt or concern in the mind of the interviewee. For instance, imagine being asked, “If the incumbent was convicted of running a cock-fighting ring, would this influence your vote in the upcoming election?” Depending on your opinion of roosters or animal cruelty in general, it may or may not affect your

vote, but such questions often influence voter perceptions of candidates and result in rumors being circulated.

Problem-Solving Interviews

When experiencing difficulties or facing an unknown challenge, people may engage in **problem-solving interviews**, those in which a problem is isolated and solutions are generated. These types of interviews may be conducted by someone with greater experience or insight than the person being interviewed. Students, for example, may be questioned by their professors in order to determine why they may be experiencing difficulties in a class. Sometimes problem-solving interviews are conducted by someone with general knowledge of a situation but whose fresh approach can be beneficial. For instance, a colleague may be asked to engage in a problem-solving interview when difficulties are encountered with a project at work. Someone not involved with a situation will often provide alternative approaches to solving a problem.

Helping Interviews

Unlike problem-solving interviews, **helping interviews** are always conducted by someone with expertise in a given area and whose services are engaged by someone in need of advice. The most obvious example of a helping interview would be a psychologist asking questions of a client. However, other helping interviews include those conducted by credit card counselors with people facing a heavy debt load or attorneys advising clients on legal matters.



Photo 16.1 What is the difference between information-gathering interviews like the one pictured here and persuasive interviews? Is the difference always obvious to the person being interviewed?

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/wdstock.

Pre-interview Responsibilities

Having examined the characteristics of interviews and different types of interviews, we will now focus our attention fully on employment interviews. Although other types of interviews are important, as mentioned previously employment interviews are likely the most important for people reading this book. The entire employment interview process will be discussed, from pre-interview responsibilities of both an interviewer and an interviewee to post-interview responsibilities of both an interviewer and an interviewee. Along the way, we will explore the beginning of an interview, how interviewers should ask questions, how interviewees should answer questions, and how an interview should come to a close. So, let's get started by discussing what should be done in preparation for an interview.

Interviewer Responsibilities

We will begin our discussion of pre-interview responsibilities by focusing on the duties of an interviewer. There are four primary responsibilities of the interviewer prior to the interview: (1) reviewing application material, (2) preparing questions and interview outline, (3) gathering materials, and (4) beginning on time.

Review Application Material

The interviewer should review a job candidate's application material prior to the interview. Accordingly, you should not use the interview itself to review the application material. Doing so conveys a lack of preparation and respect, and it wastes valuable time that should be used to conduct the interview. Furthermore, as we will now discuss, reviewing a job candidate's application material should be done beforehand in order to develop specific questions to ask each individual interviewee.

Prepare Questions and Interview Outline

The interviewer should prepare a list of questions in advance of the interview. (Various types of interview questions are discussed later in the chapter.) Preparing questions in advance helps ensure that the information desired from the job candidate is elicited. It also helps ensure that the interview will be conducted within the proper time constraints. If multiple job candidates are being interviewed, using common questions will make it easier to compare and contrast them. However, each interview will demand the inclusion of unique questions adapted to each individual interviewee.

These questions should be included in an interview outline, which reminds the interviewer of his or her duties during the various parts of an interview. For instance, as we will discuss later, an interviewer should provide the interviewee with a purpose and agenda at the beginning of an interview and summarize the interview, ask for questions, and preview future action and the schedule among other tasks in the conclusion. Including these tasks in an interview outline will help make sure they are included during the interview. We urge you to be diligent in your creation of interview questions and interview outlines. This task can be the difference between conducting a successful interview and conducting a poor interview.

Gather Materials

The interviewer should gather materials needed for the interview before the interviewee arrives rather than after he or she arrives. Searching for the application material, interview outline, and writing materials for notes—even if these things are close by—indicates a lack of preparation and, consequently, a lack of respect for the interviewee. It also takes up valuable time that should be dedicated to conducting the interview.

Begin on Time

The interviewer should strive to begin the interview on schedule rather than causing a delay. As with failing to gather materials beforehand, making the interviewee wait past the scheduled time is unprofessional and conveys a lack of respect for the interviewee. Avoid scheduling a meeting or other activity that may run long immediately before an interview. If multiple interviews are being conducted during a single day or period of

time, make sure some time is scheduled between them and maintain adherence to the schedules of the interviews themselves. Ideally, there will be enough time prior to an interview to gather material and review the application material and enough time following an interview to review your performance and to evaluate the interviewee.

Interviewee Responsibilities

An interviewee also has responsibilities prior to the interview. There are a total of seven duties that must be conducted by the interviewee: (1) gathering information, (2) preparing questions, (3) practicing, (4) ensuring a professional personal appearance, (5) bringing materials, (6) arriving on time, and (7) turning off the cell phone.

Gather Information

Prior to an employment interview, an interviewee must gather information about the organization, about the profession, and about him- or herself. Communication professionals have traditionally focused on the need to gather information about the organization, but the latter two areas are just as significant.

Exhibiting knowledge about the organization during the interview will convey proper preparation, enthusiasm for the position, and a desire to become part of the organization. As we will discuss later in the chapter, exhibiting knowledge about the organization is a distinguishing characteristic of successful and unsuccessful interviewees. Such information may include the organization's history, future plans, challenges, accomplishments, and other characteristics. Exhibiting knowledge about the profession during the interview will also be beneficial. A job candidate will most likely possess knowledge about the profession before gathering information. However, it is especially important that interviewees appear knowledgeable of the latest developments within the profession. Furthermore, addressing such developments in relation to the organization's needs and goals will be especially impressive.

An interviewee should also gather information about him- or herself. Perhaps *gathered* is not as appropriate as the term *formulate*. People already possess knowledge and information about themselves, but this information is not necessarily composed in a way that can be clearly articulated. It may not even be clear to themselves. When it comes to the interview, though, this information needs to be conveyed in a clear and supportive manner. Accordingly, gathering *or* formulating information about oneself must be done in preparation for an interview. Table 16.1 offers some questions to help guide this formulation.



Photo 16.2 The person in this picture is reviewing application material prior to interviewing a job candidate. What are the other responsibilities of an interviewer prior to the interview?

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/fstop123.

Table 16.1 Formulating Information About Oneself

| |
|---|
| What are my long-term professional goals? How will they be achieved? |
| What are my short-term professional goals? How will they be achieved? |
| What are my greatest achievements? What did I learn from them? |
| What are my greatest failures? What did I learn from them? |
| What are my greatest strengths? How am I using them and developing them? |
| What are my greatest weaknesses? How am I overcoming them? |
| Why did I choose this profession? |
| Why do I want this position? How does this position fit with my professional goals? |
| Why do I want to work for this organization? How does this organization fit with my professional goals? |
| What professional experiences have made me an ideal candidate for this position? |
| What education and training have made me an ideal candidate for this position? |
| What skills make me an ideal candidate for this position? |

Prepare Questions

An interviewee should also prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer concerning the organization and the position. Questions about the organization could surround future goals, organizational structure, perceived challenges and strengths of the organization, organizational culture, and management style. Questions concerning the position could include such topics as experiences of previous employees, history of the position, evaluation of performance, percentage of time devoted to various responsibilities of the position, perceived challenges and opportunities of the position, amount of supervision, and why the position is now available.

There are a few lines of questioning that should be avoided by an interviewee. Questions deemed illegal when asked by an interviewer should not be asked by an interviewee. Asking these questions would not result in legal consequences, but they are just as discriminatory and inappropriate as when asked by an interviewer. (We will discuss illegal questions later in this chapter.) Also, an interviewee should not ask questions with answers available on an organization's Web site or material already provided by the organization. Asking such questions would suggest, appropriately, a lack of preparation of the part of an interviewee. An interviewee should also avoid asking about salary or benefits. If you are like us, answers to questions about salary and benefits would seem helpful in determining whether or not the position would be accepted if offered. However, most professional cultures deem such questions inappropriate, so it is advisable to not ask them.

Practice

An interviewee should also practice the interview as part of his or her preparation. Compile a list of questions that you might be asked during an interview. (Some of the most common interview questions are discussed later in this chapter.) Once these

questions have been compiled, practice answering them aloud. Having an idea about what you might say is not sufficient. Actually articulating your thoughts and hearing the words come out of your mouth will better prepare you for the actual interview. If possible, have someone else play the role of the interviewer and ask you questions (some of which may come from your list and some which may not). Make the interview situation as complete and as realistic as possible, including arrival at the interview setting, initiating the interview, answering the questions, concluding the interview, and leaving the interview setting. You may even want to dress as you will at the actual interview. Practicing will also enable you to diminish some of those unknown elements of interviewing that often lead to nervousness and anxiety.

Professional Personal Appearance

Personal appearance—including clothing, hairstyles, tattoos, jewelry, makeup, and hygiene—is a reflection of how you perceive yourself, how you wish to be perceived by others, and your relationship with others. People make judgments, accurately or not, based on the appearance of others. Accordingly, interviewees should strive to convey credibility and professionalism through their personal appearance, and should appear in a manner consistent with expectations of the interviewer in order to establish relational connections with him or her. Rather than developing a one-size-fits-all model of interview appearance, it is best to dress according to the position for which you are interviewing. The general rule of thumb is dressing one step above how you would generally dress for the position if hired. And, when in doubt, it is always better to be overdressed rather than underdressed.

Arrive on Time

Few other behaviors make a worse impression than arriving late to an interview. Arriving late not only is unprofessional and disrespectful but also may result in decreasing the amount of time available for the interview. Of course, arriving too early might make an interviewee seem overeager. So, we are not suggesting you arrive two hours before the interview is scheduled. Planning to arrive 15 minutes early will enable you to be punctual without appearing overly enthusiastic or nervous. If you do happen to arrive early, use that time to freshen up and review your materials.

Bring Materials

Speaking of materials, an interviewee should bring some to the interview. You should plan on bringing (1) additional copies of your résumé, (2) paper and writing utensils, and (3) a list questions to ask the interviewer. In most situations, these items should be housed within a briefcase or professional-looking folder. Copies of your résumé will allow you to provide the interviewer with an additional copy if necessary and to review specific items with the interviewer if he or she so desires. The paper and writing utensils will allow you to take notes during the interview. The list of questions exhibits preparation and will enable you to remember specific questions you want to ask.

For some people, asking them to bring paper and writing utensils might be like asking them to bring a stone tablet, chisel, and hammer. In other words, it may seem outdated since these people (perhaps you) primarily record items using a laptop computer or PDA (personal digital assistant). At this point, in the majority of workplaces,

technological expectations would not include the use of a laptop computer or PDA during an interview. Accordingly, the interviewer may find their use strange and perhaps even unprofessional. However, perceptions of technology are continuously changing (Chapter 12), and the use of these items may be more acceptable in the near future. Furthermore, there may be some organizations and industries in which they are acceptable now. The use of these items may also make you appear technologically savvy and progressive, which could be seen as a bonus by some interviewers. Use your best judgment as to whether a laptop computer or PDA would be appropriate, given the expectations of the interviewer and the identity you wish to convey during the interview.

Turn Off the Cell Phone

Perceptions of technology are continuously changing, but it will be a long time before the ringing of a cell phone is deemed an appropriate occurrence during an employment interview. You should turn off your cell phone completely and keep it out of sight during an interview. Your sole focus should be on the interviewer and the discussion at hand. We sincerely hope it never happens to you, but if you do forget to turn off your cell phone during an interview and it happens to ring, quickly apologize to the interviewer and turn it off at that time. Do not answer the call—even to tell the person you will call him or her back. Certainly do not carry on a conversation with the person who called. Your professionalism and respect for the interviewer (along with yourself) will be called into question by a ringing cell phone.

Much of what is discussed in this chapter involves face-to-face interviews, but you may also be asked to interview by telephone or Webcam. Here are some tips for these types of interviews.

Telephone Interviews

1. Select a quiet place that is free potential distractions.
2. Do not eat, drink, or chew gum.
3. Even though the interviewer will not see you smile, doing so will come through in your voice.
4. Stand or sit up straight in order to strengthen your voice.
5. Avoid nonfluencies such as “um” or “uh,” since these are even more obvious over the telephone.
6. Have your résumé, notes, and other materials available should you need them.

Webcam Interviews

1. Select a quiet place that is free of potential distractions.
2. Test the camera and speaker prior to the interview.
3. Be aware of what appears in the background and remove anything that could be distracting.
4. Your personal appearance should mirror your appearance for a face-to-face interview.
5. Look directly at the camera, but avoid staring at it, much like you would avoid staring at someone with whom you are talking face-to-face.
6. Remember that the interviewer may be able to see and hear you prior to the interview and immediately following the interview.

Beginning an Employment Interview

Now that the pre-interview responsibilities have been accomplished, it is time to begin the interview. When beginning an interview, the participants must (1) greet one another and establish proxemics, (2) negotiate the relational connection and tone of the interview, and (3) establish the purpose and agenda of the interview.

Greeting and Establishing Proxemics

Initial impressions have a tremendous impact on perceptions of another person and whether additional contact is desired. Accordingly, the opening moments are crucial to the success of an interview, especially for an interviewee.

As an interviewee, you must convey respect for an interviewer's space (Chapter 3). If the interview takes place in an office, always knock and wait for permission to enter prior to entering, even if the door is open. Unless directed to do otherwise, address the interviewer using his or her last name and a formal or professional title (Dr., Mr., Ms., Your Holiness). Exchange greetings and introduce yourself, if necessary, while initiating a professional handshake with the interviewer to establish a positive relational connection and to suggest confidence. Shaking hands with a firm grip while looking the other person in the eye has been shown to increase ratings of employment suitability by interviewers (Stewart, Dustin, Barrick, & Darnold, 2008). Fist bumps or high fives are never appropriate, unless the interviewer is a Wonder Twin or has just completed an incredible athletic feat! Wait for the interviewer to direct you to where you will be positioned during the interview, rather than moving to an area or being seated beforehand.

As an interviewer, strive to make the interviewee feel welcomed and appreciated through your greeting. Initiate a handshake, if the interviewee has not already done so. Prepare in advance where the interviewee will be positioned for the interview and direct him or her to that space accordingly. As we will discuss, where you and the interviewee are positioned will impact the relational connection and tone of the interview.

Listen In on Your Own Life



Recall employment interviews in which you have been either the interviewee or the interviewer. Assess which aspects of the interview went well and

which aspects of the interview needed improvement. As you read this chapter, consider how your entire performance could be improved. If you have never participated in an employment interview, ask someone you know who has done so to describe his or her interview experiences to you.

The guidelines offered here are most appropriate in Western cultures. Be certain to keep cultural differences involving space and touch in mind when considering interviews in other cultural contexts.

Negotiating Relational Connection and Tone

During most employment interviews, the interviewer possesses more power than the interviewee. The extent of that power distance and the tone of the interview (formal, relaxed, humorous, serious) will be negotiated by the interviewer and interviewee. This negotiation will take place throughout the course of an interview but is often established its opening moments. Although interviewees are free to attempt to develop whatever relational connection and tone they desire, it is generally best to follow the verbal and nonverbal cues of the interviewer, especially if they want the job.

Verbal cues from an interviewer will inform an interviewee of the desired tone and relationship. If an interviewer asks to be called by his or her first name, that could be an indication of a relatively relaxed interview context and a sense of equality with the interviewee. If an interviewer makes a joke at the beginning of an interview, that might also be an indication of a generally relaxed interview context. Self-disclosure, or perhaps even self-deprecation, may be an indication of a desire for equality. An interviewer may very well verbally announce a desire for a relaxed interview context. If an interviewer does none of these things or does not verbally indicate informality or equality in other ways, he or she probably expects a formal, traditional interview context.

Accompanying nonverbal cues from an interviewer will also inform an interviewee of the desired tone and relationship. Smiling along with other positive nonverbal behaviors will certainly indicate a different tone than would frowning and other negative nonverbal behaviors. Beyond these cues, however, the placement of an interviewee in relation to the interviewer may indicate the degree of formality of the interview and the relational connection the interviewer wishes to develop. For instance, an interviewer seated on one side of a desk and an interviewee seated on the other side would indicate a more formal interview and a less equal relationship. On the other hand, an interviewer seated next to an interviewee, perhaps on chairs positioned at right angles with one another, would indicate a more relaxed interview and a more equal relationship.

Establishing Purpose and Agenda

Establishing the purpose and agenda is the responsibility of the interviewer. The purpose of an employment interview is fairly obvious, but establishing the agenda is especially important. As an interviewer, you should inform the interviewee how long the interview will take place. You may also want to preview the areas of questioning or other features to make an interviewee more comfortable through the partial removal of unknown variables. Doing so also establishes your expectations as an interviewer of how the interview will be conducted.

Don't forget to genuinely smile during your next employment interview. Interviewees with genuine dynamic smiles are evaluated more favorably by interviewers than those with fake smiles or neutral facial expressions (Krumhuber, Manstead, Cosker, Marshall, & Rosin, 2009).

Asking the Questions During an Employment Interview

Now that the interview has begun, it is time to address the matter of questions and answers. We will first examine the types of questions that an interviewer can ask during the interview and then examine different styles of questioning. You may be at the point in your professional life where you are more concerned about being an interviewee rather than an interviewer. However, even if this is the case, you may very well be conducting interviews in the future. Further, knowing what the interviewer is doing will help you immensely as an interviewee.

There are three pairs of question types that may be asked during an interview: (1) primary and secondary, (2) open and closed, (3) neutral and leading. There also exist different styles of questioning involving the amount of control exerted by the interviewer. As an interviewer, you must also be aware of illegal lines of questioning that must be avoided. We will begin our exploration of asking the questions by examining the different types of questions that can be asked.

Primary and Secondary Questions

Prior to an interview, an interviewer will likely have compiled a list of questions covering the primary topics that he or she wishes to discuss with an interviewee. Questions that introduce new topics during an interview are known as **primary questions**. Examples of primary questions include the following:

- What led to your interest in digital storytelling?
- What responsibilities did you have at your last job?
- What experience do you have working with flux capacitors?
- In what ways has your major prepared you for a position like this one?

Interviewee responses to questions will likely lead an interviewer to ask follow-up questions to seek elaboration or further information. These types of questions are known as **secondary questions**, of which there are two main types: probing questions and mirror questions. **Probing questions** are brief statements or words that urge an interviewee to continue or to elaborate on a response such as “Go on,” “Uh uh,” and “What else?” **Mirror questions** paraphrase an interviewee’s previous response to ensure clarification and to elicit elaboration. For instance, an interviewer may ask, “From what you said, it seems you have previous experience with this product line, but have you had direct experience working in this market?” Additional examples of secondary questions include the following:

- What other aspects did you find most rewarding?
- In what ways?
- Which of those did you most dislike?
- Is that correct?

The best way to distinguish primary and secondary questions is that secondary questions only make sense when preceded by a primary question and subsequent response. Beginning a series of questions with any of the preceding examples would not make any sense.

Open and Closed Questions

The questions asked during an interview will either be open or closed. **Open questions** are those that enable and prompt interviewees to answer in a wide range of responses. Examples of open questions include the following:

- Tell me about your decision to become a Foley artist.
- What led you to volunteer with the Retired Professors Fund?
- Describe a time when you had to work with a group.
- How would you describe your work ethic?

Open questions serve three important functions. First, and most obvious, open questions enable interviewers to gather information about an interviewee. Second, these questions enable an interviewer to assess the communication skills of an interviewee. Third, open questions provide valuable insight into the worldview of an interviewee. Recalling both the presentational nature of communication discussed in Chapter 1 and Kenneth Burke's pentad in Chapter 2, words and stories have meaning beyond that which appears on the surface and provide a glimpse into how people perceive situations, themselves, and others.

Contrary to open questions, **closed questions** are those that limit the range of an interviewee's response. Examples of closed questions include the following:

- Where did you attend college?
- What positions did you hold at your previous company?
- Are you willing to work weekends?
- What was the most difficult aspect of your past job?

Closed questions serve important functions during an interview. Closed questions do not take up as much time as open questions, so they can be especially valuable when time is limited. These questions can also be used to gather specific information about an interviewee. Finally, the answers to closed questions make it relatively easy to compare and contrast candidates for a position. Such evaluations are especially easy to make when dealing with **bipolar questions**, a type of closed question that forces an interviewee to select one of two responses. The answers to bipolar questions are frequently either "yes" or "no." The third example in the preceding list would be considered a bipolar question that would be answered with either an affirmative or a negative. Some bipolar questions ask interviewees to select between two presented choices. For instance, an interviewer might ask, "Which do you believe is most important to success at work—hard work or talent?"

Neutral and Leading Questions

When developing questions for an interview, it is best to include neutral questions and to avoid leading questions. **Neutral questions** provide an interviewee with no indication of a preferred way to respond. Examples of neutral questions include the following:

- Why did you select communication studies as a major?
- What do you think of our new product line?
- What are your thoughts on labor unions?
- Describe the qualities of your previous supervisor.

Notice that these examples do not direct an interviewee toward a specific response or one that is obviously preferred by the interviewer. Some people might believe that the second example involving a “new product line” would direct an interview toward a favorable response. However, an interviewer may want to determine whether the interviewee is someone who would not be afraid to express opinions and who would be able to improve and enhance the company’s products.

Leading questions are those that suggest to an interviewee a preferred way to respond. Examples of these types of questions include the following and are based on those in the preceding list:

- What influenced your incredibly wise decision to major in communication studies?
- You do approve of our new product line, don’t you?
- What are some of the problems you see with labor unions?
- What did you like most about your previous supervisor?

In these examples, an interviewer would be guiding an interviewee toward a specific type of answer. (We know that the decision to major in communication studies is obviously incredibly wise, but the first one still counts!) Generally, it is best to avoid leading questions during interviews and not to give interviewees an indication about how they should answer. Still, leading questions are sometimes used to determine whether an interviewee is someone who would hold his or her ground. Once again, the production line example could be a test to determine an interviewee’s confidence and ability to voice concerns.

Directive and Nondirective Questioning

The fact that interviews are controlled is one of their characteristics mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, the amount of control exerted during an interview will vary, based especially on the specific goal of an interview. Some types of interviews require great control by the interviewer, while other types of interviews require little control and more flexibility by the interviewer.

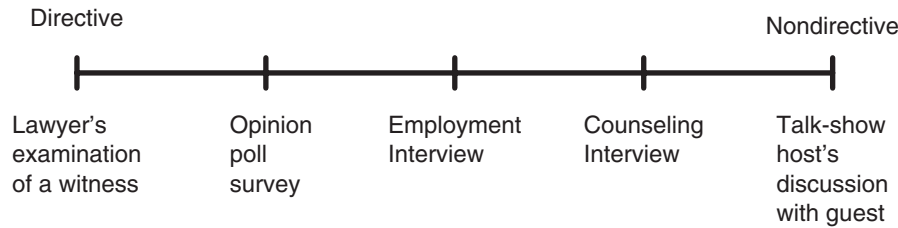


Figure 16.1 A Continuum of Interviewer Control

Directive interviews are those that are greatly controlled by an interviewer. Questions tend to be closed and perhaps leading (Stewart & Cash, 2000). A directive interviewer tends to follow a clear line of questioning, deviating only to guide an interviewee back on topic or when wanting an interviewee to elaborate. Watch an attorney cross-examining a witness on *Law & Order* for a good example of a directive interview. The questions are certainly leading and many tend to be closed. Further, the person being questioned on the stand is not allowed to deviate from the line of questioning, with the attorney being fully in control.

Nondirective interviews, on the other hand, are those in which the direction of the interview is primarily given to the interviewee. A nondirective interviewer generally introduces fairly broad topic areas and then allows an interviewee to “take off” in whatever direction desired. Accordingly, the questions asked tend to be open and neutral (Stewart & Cash, 2000). For an example of nondirective interview, watch a talk-show host interviewing a celebrity. A pre-interview of sorts has occurred prior to the program in which members of the staff have asked what the celebrity would like to talk about and have discussed possible questions the host might ask. During the actual program, the host will ask a general question (How’s the weather?) knowing the celebrity will take it from there. The examples featured in Figure 16.1 are those offered by Gouran, Wiethoff, and Dolger (1994) and exhibit the range of directive and nondirective interviews.

Contrarian Challenge



We—along with the federal government—encourage you to avoid asking illegal questions as part of the interview process. However, aside from instances of bona fide occupational qualifications, are there instances during which asking such questions would be beneficial? Should they be allowed during the interview process?

Avoiding Illegal Questions

When seeking the best candidate for the job, it may seem like a good idea to ask as many questions as possible and to learn as much as possible about someone, including many intricate details of his or her life. However, there are some questions that cannot be asked and for good reason—they are potentially discriminatory. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws have been established, in part, to prevent possible discrimination during the hiring process, whether it is done intentionally or unintentionally. Even the most well-intentioned

comment or question can be discriminatory; therefore, you should be aware of questions that must be avoided.

Common areas which cannot be discussed with potential employees include age, marital/family status, ethnicity/national origin, religion, affiliations, and disabilities. In some cases, however, otherwise illegal areas of questioning are allowed. Some jobs demand certain abilities or requirements, known as *bona fide occupational qualifications*. For instance, it is illegal to inquire about the age of an applicant unless there is a minimum age requirement for a job or unless the job is one where a retirement age is enforced, such as a commercial airline pilot. Working for a religious organization may require affiliation with that religion. Furthermore, some occupations require certain physical abilities. However, bona fide occupational qualifications that counter discriminatory questions are not as common as you might think, and it is best to avoid areas of potential discrimination. Table 16.2 presents areas to avoid along with examples of illegal and legal questions.

You can learn more about illegal questions and workers' rights by visiting the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Web site at <http://www.eeoc.gov/>.

Table 16.2 Avoiding Illegal Questions

| |
|--|
| <p>Age</p> <p><i>Illegal Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How old are you? • What year were you born? <p><i>Legal Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you 21 years old or older, and thereby legally allowed to accept this position if offered? • Are you under the age of 60 years old, and thereby legally allowed to accept this position if offered? |
| <p>Marital/Family Status</p> <p><i>Illegal Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you married or living with a partner? • Are you pregnant? • Do you have any children or plan on having children? <p><i>Legal Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a great deal of travel involved with this position. Do you foresee any problems with this requirement? • Will the long hours required of this job pose any problems for you? • Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? • Do you have any responsibilities that may prevent you from meeting the requirements of this position? |

(Continued)

Table 16.2 (Continued)

Ethnicity/National Origin*Illegal Questions*

- What is your ethnicity?
- Where is your family from?
- Were you born in the United States?
- What is your native language?

Legal Questions

- Do you have any language abilities that would be helpful in this position?
- Are you authorized to work in the United States?

Religion*Illegal Questions*

- Are you religious?
- What religion are you?
- Do you worship regularly at a church/mosque/temple?
- Do you believe in God?

Legal Questions

- Are you able to work on Saturday evenings/Sunday mornings, if needed?

Affiliations*Illegal Questions*

- What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?
- Are you a Republican or a Democrat?
- Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

Legal Questions

- Do you belong to any professional organizations that would benefit your ability to perform this job?

Disabilities*Illegal Questions*

- What is your medical history?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- How would you describe your family's health?
- What resulted in your disability?

Legal Questions

- This job requires that a person is able to lift 100 pounds. Would you have any problems fulfilling that requirement?

Answering the Questions During an Employment Interview

Having examined the asking of questions during an interview, we can now explore the answering of questions. We will first discuss how adjusting the interview frame can

greatly benefit interviewees. Next, we will investigate some of the lessons learned from both successful and unsuccessful interviewees. Then, methods for answering some of the most common interview questions will be offered. Finally, we will discuss how to answer illegal questions should they be asked during an interview.

Adjusting the Interview Frame

Before you began reading this chapter, you probably had a good idea about what happens during an interview. It is possible that you have been through at least one before. Yet, even if you have not personally experienced an interview, you have likely seen them depicted in movies or television programs and you have likely talked about interviews with people who have experienced them. Therefore, you are well aware of the *frames* surrounding interviews. Frames were introduced in Chapter 1, and we even included interviews as an example. They are basic forms of knowledge that enable people to define a scenario, which in turn helps them determine meaning as well as understanding the roles and expectations of the participants. In the interview frame, one person generally asks a lot of questions and the other one answers them, but you are hopefully recognizing that it is more complex than this description.

How a person frames a situation often dictates what will happen. If a person frames a situation as one in which he or she will play the role of bumbling fool, then the person will likely act like a bumbling fool. Coined by Robert Merton (1957), a **self-fulfilling prophecy** maintains that if someone believes a particular outcome will take place, his or her actions will often lead to its fruition. Accordingly, if you think you will succeed (or fail) at a task, you are more likely to do so, because your actions will likely be those that lead to success (or failure). Therefore, you should always expect to perform well during an interview. Naturally, just because you expect to perform well and end up doing so does not mean that you will get the position you seek. However, it will certainly improve your chances.

We can go a bit deeper with this notion of framing an interview, though. Many interviewees frame an interview as a situation in which they are on trial to determine whether they are capable or worthy of a position and must defend themselves. Anderson and Killenberg (2009, p. 229) have suggested that an interviewee instead frame the interview less threateningly as (a) *an opportunity rather than a test*, (b) *a learning experience rather than a demonstration*, (c) and *a dialogue rather than a monologue*.

You should strive to avoid viewing the interview as a test through which your worthiness as a potential employee, skills, and knowledge, along with your value as a human being, are all being called into question. Instead, view the interview as an opportunity to discuss the many ways you could contribute to an organization, to display the skills and knowledge that make you qualified for the position, and, of course, to confirm your value as a human being. In most instances, you would not be asked to interview unless an employer already viewed you as capable of performing the duties of a position and doing so successfully.

Furthermore, do not view the interview merely as a performance in which the above attributes are displayed. Rather, view the interview as an opportunity to learn about yourself. Preparation for and participation in an interview requires determining your strengths, weaknesses, and goals, as well as reviewing how your past experiences have

brought you to your current place in this world. It is an opportunity to establish personal and professional goals.

Finally, do not view the interview as something that is dominated by one person, while the other person is relegated to a subordinate or immaterial position. Instead, an interview should be viewed as something that is created (transacted) by all participants, who are equally responsible and necessary for its development and who can all potentially gain from the experience. Both an interviewee and an interviewer gain personally and professionally from the interview. They are able to learn about themselves and others; an interviewee has an opportunity to acquire a potentially fulfilling work position, and an interviewer has an opportunity to acquire the services of someone who could potentially improve an organization.

Learning From Successful and Unsuccessful Interviewees

You are hopefully engaged in critical thinking that is discussed in Chapter 4. If so, you might find the use of a study (Einhorn, 1981) that is roughly 30 years old a bit suspect. We would be the first to tell you to be cautious when coming across apparently dated sources. In fact, we do in *The Basics of Communication: A Relational Perspective* (Duck & McMahan, 2009). In this case, however, the age of the source has not diminished the value of its findings. Still, maintain a critical stance when reading this or any book.

Reframing the interview means that an interview can be successful even if you are not offered a position. After all, each interview can be a learning experience that allows you to grow personally and professionally. However, we recognize that such growth does not matter to someone whose primary goals are simply being offered a job and not living out of his or her vehicle. So, for the moment, let's focus on success as being offered a position following an interview.

A great deal can be learned about such success from the people doing the hiring, and this is exactly what was done in a study conducted by Lois Einhorn (1981). As part of this study, the communicative choices of successful and unsuccessful

interviewees were examined and categorized. Table 16.3 outlines six key differences between successful and unsuccessful interviewee communication.

Answering Common Questions

There are many questions you might be asked during an interview, so it is impossible to cover them all. At the same time, there are a few questions (in various forms and phrasing) that come up more than others. In what follows, we will address 10 of the most common questions and discuss some of the best ways to answer them during your interview.

Table 16.3 Learning From Successful and Unsuccessful Interviewees

| |
|--|
| <p><i>Clear Career Goals</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees are able to clearly articulate their career goals and explain how those goals relate with the position for which they are interviewing.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees, on the other hand, provide no clear indication of career goals or how those goals might relate to the position for which they are interviewing.</p> |
| <p><i>Identification With Employers</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees mention the organization by name often and exhibit knowledge of the organization.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees rarely mention the organization by name and demonstrate little to no previous knowledge of the organization.</p> |
| <p><i>Support for Arguments</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees provide illustrations, comparisons and contrasts, statistics, and even testimony from colleagues, supervisors, and instructors.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees provide little evidence or support material when answering questions.</p> |
| <p><i>Participation</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees are actively involved in the development of the interview throughout the entire process and spend a great deal of the interview talking.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees play a passive role in the development of the interview and talk very little during the interview.</p> |
| <p><i>Language</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees use active, concrete, and positive words along with technical jargon associated with the position.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees use passive, ambiguous, and negative words while using little or no technical jargon.</p> |
| <p><i>Nonverbal Delivery</i></p> <p>Successful interviewees speak loudly and confidently while also using vocal variety and avoiding nonfluencies. They incorporate meaningful gestures and support interviewer comments with positive nonverbal feedback such as nodding and smiling.</p> <p>Unsuccessful interviewees speak softly and provide little vocal variety while including longer-than-appropriate pauses. They use few gestures and engage in distracting mannerisms such as rubbing their hands or shaking their legs. They also engage in little or no eye contact with the interviewer.</p> |

Tell Me a Little About Yourself.

When asked to describe yourself during an interview, the interviewer could not care less about such items as your astrological sign, favorite restaurants, achievements in youth sports, or high school prom theme. An interviewer wants to know how you could benefit the organization, and you should answer accordingly. You should discuss your



Photo 16.3 Would keeping her hands clasped throughout the interview improve or diminish this interviewee's chances of being offered the position?

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/matzaball.

education, previous work experience, career highlights and achievements, being sure to emphasize how this information fits the position and would benefit the organization.

What Are Your Greatest Strengths?

This sort of question will almost always arise during an interview in some form or another. Going into the interview, you should have a ready-made list of three or four strengths that you can discuss. Be sure to have concrete examples to support each one and show how these strengths will enable you to succeed at the position.

What Are Your Greatest Weaknesses?

If you say, “Well, I’m pretty lazy, and things would probably start disappearing from around the office if you hired me,” you probably will not get the job when asked the preceding question. It is a responsibility of the interviewee to answer all questions honestly.

That being said, you can certainly phrase your responses in a way that minimizes any weaknesses you might mention. Communication professionals often suggest the time-honored tactic of offering a weakness that sounds more like a strength. (“I am such a hard worker that I often get drained by the end of the day. And, I tend to work too many weekends.”) However, such responses sound misleading, have become a bit cliché, and do not indicate a genuine ability or interest in recognizing and addressing areas in need of improvement. You may instead want to offer a genuine weakness along with what you are doing to overcome it. (“My Excel skills are in need of development, so I have been taking a night class devoted to the program.”) This tactic is especially helpful if there is an obvious skill or ability you are lacking but that is required for the position or would benefit the position.

What Do You Know About This Organization?

When asked this question, you should exhibit an awareness of such items as the organization’s mission, history, growth, future plans, and perhaps key personnel. It is a prime opportunity to underscore your enthusiasm for the position and demonstrate how you could benefit the organization based on its present and future endeavors.

Why Do You Want to Work Here?

This question provides another opportunity to reinforce your knowledge of the organization. Likewise, it is another chance for you to discuss your enthusiasm for the position and the organization. Finally, it is a chance to show how your abilities suit the organization and how hiring you would be mutually beneficial. In doing so, you must provide

clear, explicit explanations and support for your assertions. For instance, it is not enough to say you could help the organization expand; rather, you must fully explain how you could do so. Remember, support for arguments is one of the distinguishing characteristics of successful interviewees and unsuccessful interviewees.

What Is Your Ideal Job?

This is a tricky question, because you should not necessarily say “This one”—unless that is true, in which case you should discuss why. At the same time, if you mention a job other than the position for which you are applying, it may appear as if you are uninterested or you plan to move on as soon as something better comes along. Accordingly, you should play it safe and simply *describe* attributes of an ideal position (i.e., meaningful, challenging, fulfilling) while also discussing how the present position meets that description.

Why Do You Want to Leave Your Current Job?

Your current employer may be an idiotic, unprofessional, and unethical ogre who treats you like dirt and may very well eat small children, but you should probably not be that descriptive during an interview. If there were major problems, you may want to address but not dwell on them, taking partial responsibility while discussing what you have learned from the situation. Doing so may be especially wise if the interviewer is possibly aware of these problems. More often than not, however, it is best to focus on the positive attributes of your current (or previous) job, discussing how you have developed professionally and offering legitimate reasons for wanting to leave (i.e., moving to new location, desire for professional growth). One of the reasons interviewers ask this question is to determine whether you will be happy and likely to stay if offered the position in their organization. Therefore, it is wise to discuss how this position better fits your professional goals and desires when compared to your current position.

What Are Your Expectations in Terms of Salary?

This is another very tricky question, because you do not want to put yourself out of reach and you do not want to sell yourself short. Some people suggest placing the question back on the interviewer (“What do people with my experience usually earn here?”), but the question asked for *your* expectations for salary, not his or her expectations. A good way to address this question is by conducting research beforehand to learn the average salaries for that particular position in that particular area. (“Based on the research I have conducted, I would expect the salary to be between \$40,000 and \$48,000 each year in addition to incentive bonuses.”)

Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years?

This question is usually asked to gauge a person’s ambitions, sense of reality, and fit with the company. Your answer will depend, of course, on where you actually want to be in your professional life five years from that moment. If you anticipate holding the very position for which you are interviewing, you should say so while also talking about the professional growth that will have taken place and your plans to enhance the organization through that position. If you anticipate moving through the ranks of the organization, your rise to the top should be properly ambitious and realistic. Further,

you should stress your plans for professional growth and anticipated contributions to the organization that would justify such advancement. If you anticipate not being with the organization in five years, indicating as much may be justifiable if the position is considered short-term. However, you should stress how your time at the organization would be mutually beneficial.

Why Should We Hire You?

When asked this question, you should have a very good answer. If you do not know why the organization should hire you, the interviewer will surely not know either. It may sound as if the interviewer is questioning your abilities, but he or she simply wants to know how you would benefit the organization. Accordingly, this is a perfect opportunity to reinforce your strengths and abilities by discussing how they will benefit the organization.

Dealing With Illegal Questions

We previously discussed illegal questions which should not be asked during an interview, but just because they *should not be* asked does not mean that they *will not be* asked. Sometimes this violation is intentional, while at other times it is unintentional. Whichever the case, you may very well be asked an illegal question while being interviewed for a position. How you deal with such a violation depends on such factors as your perception of its intentionality and, in all honesty, how badly you want the job. However, when it comes to the latter, if such violations occur in the interview process, you may need to seriously question whether the position and the employer are right for you. Stewart and Cash (2000, pp. 294–295) have offered strategies, outlined in Table 16.4, that can be utilized if you should be asked an illegal question during an interview and choose to continue the meeting.

Table 16.4 Strategies When Answering Illegal Questions

| |
|--|
| Tactful Refusal |
| <i>Question:</i> Where were your parents from? |
| <i>Response:</i> I don't believe my parents' places of origin matter for this position. |
| Direct but Brief Answer |
| <i>Question:</i> How did you injure your leg? |
| <i>Response:</i> It was injured while jogging. |
| Tactful Inquiry |
| <i>Question:</i> Where do you go to church? |
| <i>Response:</i> How does that question pertain to this position? |
| Neutralize Concern |
| <i>Question:</i> Do you have any children? |
| <i>Response:</i> Yes, but they would in no way interfere with my work here. |
| Exploit the Question |
| <i>Question:</i> Is English your native language? |
| <i>Response:</i> No. My native language is Ket, which would be beneficial for this company since it plans on opening offices in central Siberia next year. |

Concluding an Employment Interview

When concluding an employment interview, it is important that positive relational connections among the participants are maintained. Important information needs to be offered during the conclusion of an interview, and certain functions must take place. So, let's explore the responsibilities of both interviewers and interviewees during the conclusion of an employment interview.

Interviewer Responsibilities

We will begin with the responsibilities of an interviewer. There are six things an interviewer must do during the conclusion of an interview: (1) provide a wrap-up signal, (2) summarize the interview, (3) ask for questions, (4) preview future actions and schedule, (5) offer thanks, and (6) engage in farewells.

Wrap-Up Signal

Responsibility for controlling an interview rests with the interviewer. Therefore, the interviewer should initiate the conclusion of the interview through a **wrap-up signal**, a phrase indicating the beginning of the conclusion. (“As we near the end of the interview . . .” or “As we begin to conclude our discussion . . .”) An interviewer should always allow enough time for both parties to adequately perform their responsibilities of the conclusion, rather than trying to cram everything into the final moments of the interview.

Summarize the Interview

The interviewer should provide a straightforward, relatively brief summary of the information provided by the interviewee during the interview. Doing so will make the interviewee feel understood and will allow him or her to make any necessary clarifications. Interviewers should be careful not to sound either overly enthusiastic or overly dismissive when summarizing this information. This approach will prevent giving the interviewee either false hope or the feeling of failure.

Ask for Questions

The interviewer should always ask the interviewee for questions about the position and about the organization. The answers to these questions should be truthful and provide an accurate reflection of the position and organization. Hiring someone who has been given false



Photo 16.4 Is it the responsibility of the interviewer or interviewee to bring a formal end to the interview?

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/jsmith.

impressions may lead to negative feelings and the need to conduct another search should that person decide that the position and organization are not the good fit he or she was lead to believe. The questions asked by an interviewee will also provide additional information about that person, including knowledge and motivations.

Preview Future Actions and Schedule

The interviewer should also provide the interviewee with information pertaining to what will happen next and the schedule for decisions about the position. Interviewers are not required to provide any guarantees or odds of employment, nor do they have to disclose how many other job candidates are being interviewed for the position.

Offer Thanks

It is common to erroneously perceive an employment interview as something an interviewer is doing as a favor or because of some grand benevolence. However, the interview is being conducted, in part, because an interviewer (representing an organization) is in need of someone's professional services. Furthermore, the interviewee has invested time, energy, and emotion into the interview process. Accordingly, sincere thanks for participation in the interview should be offered.

Farewells

Finally, it is the responsibility of an interviewer to formally end the interview by offering a hand-shake and expressing a professional farewell remark to the interviewee. There is certainly no reason to prolong the formal ending of the interview, but you should avoid making it seem as if you are rushing an interviewee out of the office. Otherwise, positive relational connections that may have been established will be diminished and an otherwise constructive interview may be viewed negatively.

Interviewee Responsibilities

Along with the interviewer, the interviewee also has responsibilities during the conclusion of an interview. There are five things an interviewee must do during this part of an interview: (1) ask questions, (2) reinforce qualifications and enthusiasm, (3) inquire about the future schedule, (4) offer thanks, and (5) engage in farewells.

Ask Questions

Interviewees should have questions prepared and written out during their pre-interview preparations. As part of most interviews, an interviewer will ask whether an interviewee has any questions he or she would like to ask. Not asking any questions would indicate a lack of preparation and enthusiasm, so it is a good idea to have some developed. An interviewer may occasionally fail to provide an interviewer an opportunity to ask questions. If it is clear that the interview is ready to end and that the interviewer does not plan on asking for questions, it is acceptable to politely ask if you may pose a few questions. Remember, an interview is not just about whether an interviewee will be offered a position but also whether an interviewee would accept the position.

Reinforce Qualifications and Enthusiasm

An interviewee should also briefly summarize the qualifications that make him or her an ideal candidate, along with underscoring his or her enthusiasm for the position. Doing so will help reinforce strengths and abilities while ensuring that key experiences, education, training, and other information have been conveyed. It may also assist the interviewer in remembering and documenting these items.

Inquire About Schedule (If not provided)

The interviewer is responsible for providing an interviewee with a schedule of future contact and decision making. However, it is perfectly acceptable to inquire about this information should an interviewer fail to provide it.

Offer Thanks

As mentioned earlier, an interviewer should be grateful for the time, energy, and emotion that an interviewee must put into the interview process. Likewise, an interviewee should be grateful for the work of an interviewer. As this chapter indicates, there is a lot more work involved when interviewing people for a position, and items such as searching for job candidates (constructing the job announcement, gaining approval through human resources, advertising, reviewing applications) and completing the hiring process (deciding who gets the offer, negotiating compensation, dealing with human resources) are not even addressed. Accordingly, sincere thanks should be offered to the interviewer.

Farewells

The interviewer should initiate the formal end of the interview. An interviewee should follow the lead of the interviewer and not unnecessarily prolong the departure. A smile and professional handshake will help maintain a positive relational connection with the interviewer. As an interviewee, you should keep the Strategic Communication box in

Strategic Communication



Remember that both an interviewer and an interviewee are being evaluated at

all times, not just when questions are being asked and answered. An interviewee's behaviors prior to and following a meeting can be used when forming judgments about his or her overall character and professionalism. When interviewing, you should avoid any odd behaviors while waiting for the interview to take place or when leaving the interview location, while also remembering to be respectful of the office staff—they generally deserve such respect regardless of whether you are attempting to make a good impression. Also, interview sessions occasionally include tours of buildings, introductions to members of the organization, meals, and transportation to or from the interview location. An interviewee will be evaluated throughout all of these situations, so make sure you remain aware that assessments are being made. Such occasions and activities are also a good opportunity to evaluate the interviewer and determine whether the position or organization is right for you.

mind when making an exit, and remember that your evaluation as a job candidate will continue until you completely leave the interview location.

Post-interview Responsibilities

Just because the interview has been concluded does not mean that the work is done. Both interviewers and interviewees have post-interview responsibilities that are vital to their professional development and that will improve their chances of being offered the position (interviewees) and determining the best candidate for the organization (interviewers). We will begin our discussion with the responsibilities of an interviewer.

Interviewer Responsibilities

Following the interview, an interviewer must complete the following tasks: (1) review the job candidate, (2) assess his or her personal performance, and (3) contact the interviewee with a final decision about the position.

Assess the Job Candidate

An interviewer should record his or her evaluation of the interviewee along with any additional thoughts or information as soon as possible following the interview. Recording impressions and other relevant information is especially important if many interviews are being conducted, and doing so as soon as possible will reduce the amount of information that is lost with time. Contact with references, documented experience, training, and other background information will be used when making final employment decisions, but information gleaned from the interview is also very important when making such decisions and should be properly documented. Table 16.5 provides areas that can be addressed when evaluating a job candidate following the interview.

Table 16.5 Assessing a Job Candidate

| |
|--|
| What are the candidate's strengths? |
| What are the candidate's weaknesses? |
| How does this candidate compare with other candidates? |
| How personable does the candidate seem? |
| How would the candidate fit with the organization's climate? |
| How knowledgeable about the position and the organization does the candidate seem? |
| Are there any concerns about whether the candidate would be successful at this position? |
| What additional questions or information about the candidate need to be addressed? |

Assess Personal Performance

The interviewer should also assess his or her performance in order to improve both personally and professionally. Focus equally on the positive aspects of the interview performance and negative aspects of the interview performance. Regardless of how much interviewing experience you may possess, there is always room for improvement. Table 16.6 provides a few questions you may pose when evaluating your performance as an interviewer.

Table 16.6 Assessing Performance as Interviewer

| |
|---|
| Did I make the interviewee comfortable and establish the desired tone of the interview? How can I improve these aspects of the interview? |
| Did my questions elicit the information needed to fully evaluate the job candidate? How can I improve these questions to enhance the quality of the information gained? |
| Did I avoid illegal questions? |
| What nonverbal communication most benefited my performance? How can I improve my nonverbal communication? |
| How well did I listen during the interview? How can I improve my listening? |
| Were my responses to the questions posed by the interviewee complete and accurate? In what ways can I improve my responses? |
| Did I provide the interviewee with information about future contact and a realistic timetable for decisions about the position? |
| Was the interview conducted within the time constraints? Did all portions of the interview receive the appropriate amount of attention? How can I improve my use of time? |

Contact Interviewee

The interviewer should ensure that *all* interviewees are contacted about the final decision. This contact should either come personally or through whatever method is used by the organization. Contacting interviewees is a professional courtesy that, unfortunately, is increasingly absent during many job searches. There exists no legitimate excuse for not contacting and acknowledging a job candidate who did not receive an offer. Not contacting job candidates is not only unprofessional but also cruel! Additionally, a person may not have been suited for this position, but he or she may be ideal for a future position. A lack of contact may prevent a well-suited candidate from applying for a future position—for good reason. A person who is mistreated during the interview process may eventually be in a position that could negatively influence the organization. Ultimately, interviewers should simply contact all interviewees because it is the humane thing to do.

Interviewee Responsibilities

An interviewee has three responsibilities following an interview: (1) assess the interview, (2) send a follow-up letter, and (3) avoid irritating the interviewer.

Assess the Interview

Following the interview, an interviewee should develop a candid assessment of his or her performance along with a candid assessment of the position and organization. The sooner this assessment can be conducted, the fresher the information and the more accurate the recollection. Strive to give equal attention to the aspects of the interview that went well and those that need improvement. Regardless of how you might feel about the interview, even the best interview can be improved, and an awful interview is never as bad as it seems. The best way to improve as an interviewee is through an honest assessment of your performance.

An interviewee should also develop an honest assessment of the position and organization. Developing this assessment will help determine whether the position is something you will accept if offered. It will also increase your understanding about careers and industries for which you are interviewing. Tables 16.7 and 16.8 provide questions to assess your performance, the position, and the organization.

Table 16.7 Assessing Performance as Interviewee

| |
|---|
| Which questions were answered well? What made these good answers? |
| What questions were not answered well? How can I improve these answers? |
| Were my questions appropriate? How can I improve these questions? |
| What nonverbal communication most benefited my performance? How can I improve my nonverbal communication? |
| How well did I listen during the interview? How can I improve my listening? |

Table 16.8 Assessing Position and Organization

| |
|--|
| What are the pros and cons of the position? |
| What are the pros and cons of the organization? |
| How does this position compare with other available positions? |
| How does this organization compare with other organizations? |
| How has my understanding and evaluation of this career/profession changed? |

Send Follow-Up Letter

An interviewee should also send a letter of thanks following the interview. In addition to thanking the interviewer for his or her time, it is an opportunity to reinforce interest in the position and remind the interviewer of qualifications and experience. If something was not mentioned during the interview, this letter is a good opportunity to add that information. Interviewers occasionally ask for additional information or materials.

These items can be included with the letter as well. Do not appear overly confident about the interview, nor should you apologize for a less-than-stellar interview. The letter should also be viewed as a professional correspondence. Accordingly, it should be respectful, well written, and free of grammatical errors. The format of the letter can be handwritten, typed, or e-mailed, although some people disagree about which one of these is most appropriate. People and organizations view technology in different ways (Chapter 12), so use your best judgment as to whether it will be deemed an appropriate method of correspondence.

Avoid Irritating the Interviewer

This post-interview requirement may seem obvious, but you should avoid irritating the interviewer by inquiring about the progress of a job search. Do not send the interviewer numerous letters, leave phone messages every hour on the hour, or send the interviewer a Facebook friendship request. We understand that waiting for an employment decision can be excruciatingly painful, but waiting is something that must be done. Irritating the interviewer will in no way increase your chances at being offered the position and will likely hinder those chances. If you have not heard from the interviewer by the time he or she indicated you would be contacted, however, it is acceptable to politely inquire about the status of the position. A number of variables can lead to a delay in the search process, so it is not uncommon nor is it necessarily a personal affront against you. The organization may very well be busy renting a truck to dump a load of money on your doorstep.

Cover Letters and Résumés

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, you will not be invited to an employment interview without a quality cover letter and résumé. Accordingly, we will now address some key elements in the construction of these essential items. We will begin by discussing the cover letter, which is the tool used to get a potential employer to actually review your résumé.

Cover Letters

A **cover letter** has four purposes: (1) declare interest in the position, (2) provide a summary of qualifications, (3) compel the person to read your résumé, and (4) request an interview. Employers often receive numerous applications for a single position, and quite often application materials are given only slight attention. Therefore, hopeful employees should do everything possible to ensure that their materials stand out from the rest and receive adequate attention. In what follows, we will present the key elements of effective cover letters.

Address Letter to Specific Person

Many applicants do not take the time to confirm who will be reading their materials and consequently do not address their cover letter to a specific person. Simply addressing the

letter “To Whom it May Concern” will not make your cover letter stand out from the rest and will elicit *little* concern from whoever receives it. A quick phone call to the organization will likely provide you with the name of the person to whom the letter should be addressed, if it is unavailable in the job announcement/advertisement. Be certain to use the person’s last name only and to address the person using his or her proper title.

Identify the Position

Identify the position for which you are applying in the first paragraph of the letter. An organization may have multiple positions available, and you want to ensure that you are being considered for the one you intend. You should also indicate how you discovered the position’s availability. Finally, you should display knowledge about and positive regard for the organization. Including this information shows that you have taken the time to learn about the organization and that you view it favorably. Some applicants—especially those applying for hundreds of positions—use form cover letters and change nothing but the name and address of the company. Such form letters will generate less interest than letters in which the applicant appears clearly knowledgeable about the organization and interested in working there.

Summarize Qualifications and Promote Résumé

Summarize the qualifications that make you an ideal fit for the position in the second paragraph. You may discuss such items as your education and training, experiences, special skills, and activities that have prepared you for the position and that will enable you to successfully fulfill the duties of the position. Be sure to emphasize what you can provide the organization. At the end of this paragraph, you should encourage the reader to refer to your résumé. You can do this by mentioning specific information that can be discovered there or by simply mentioning the additional information that can be discovered through its examination.

Reaffirm Interest and Request an Interview

Reaffirm your interest in the position and request an interview in the final paragraph of the cover letter. You may want to indicate your intention to contact this person in the future (“I will contact you in two weeks to see if you require additional information about my credentials or desire any additional materials”). Another option in the final paragraph is to request a date to meet with the employer. This might be especially appropriate if you are presently located in an area other than the organization and will happen to be visiting that area (“I will be in the Keynsham area June 30–July 5 and would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you during that time to discuss my qualifications in more detail”).

Sign Off With Respect and Professionalism

When ending the letter, you should use the terms *Sincerely* or *Respectfully* or *Cordially* rather than *Yours Truly* or *Yours Faithfully*, which are too personal when corresponding with someone you likely do not know, and rather than *Best Wishes* or *Cheers*, which are too informal for a professional letter. Use your full name and do not use a nickname. Sign the letter using dark ink in a legible and professional manner, avoiding

unnecessary flourish (i.e., no swirly lines at the end or hearts/smiley faces dotting an *i*). You should end the letter properly to ensure the quality of the letter established thus far is maintained.

Résumés

The purpose of a **résumé** is to present your credentials for a position in a clear and concise manner. Employers may spend less than a minute looking at your résumé, so the information included should be not only clear and concise but also positive and obviously appropriate to the position for which you are applying. In what follows, we will discuss the key elements of effective résumés.

Name and Contact Information

As with your cover letter, you should use your full name when constructing a résumé and avoid using nicknames. Include the following contact information: (1) address, (2) telephone number, and (3) e-mail address. Include a personal Web site address only if it is solely professional or academic. If you are a student, you may have both a campus address and telephone number and a permanent address and telephone number. If this is the case, include both your campus contact information and permanent address contact information. As mentioned in Chapter 11, make sure that your e-mail address adheres to professional standards. Someone whose e-mail address begins *Lazydrunk93* will not receive many interview offers!

Cover letters and résumés should be easy for the employer to read. They should be sent flat rather than folded and printed on light-colored paper rather than dark-colored paper. Of course, some employers prefer to receive application material digitally (Schullery, Ickes, & Schullery, 2009). Furthermore, many career networking sites enable applicants to post video résumés. Be sure to read position announcements carefully to determine an employer's preferred method of delivery.

Career Objective

Next, you must include your career objective. This objective should be one sentence and never over two sentences. It should also be explicitly tailored to meet the needs of the organization and the position for which you are applying. The employer will be asking him- or herself what you can do for the organization, not what the organization can do for you. A vague statement of interests and a lack of commitment to the organization will not suffice.

Education and Training

Education and training should follow your career objective. List your degrees or training in reverse chronological order, so that your most recent information (and likely most relevant) appears first. Listing your high school degree is not necessary if you are presently enrolled in or have completed college. This section should include

the following information: (1) degree completion (or expected completion) date along with all majors or minors; (2) college name and location; and (3) awards, honors, or certificates. Use your own best judgment as to whether you should include your grade point average. Some fields may place more importance on this number than others.

Experiences

The experiences section of your résumé will include your employment history and other relevant endeavors such as volunteer work if these endeavors happen to be relevant to the position for which you are applying. As with your education history, list your experiences in reverse chronological order. This section should include the following information: (1) position; (2) name of the organization along with location (city and state); (3) dates of employment or service (month and year); and (4) responsibilities and accomplishments. Your responsibilities and accomplishments are especially important in this section, and you should emphasize those which are most applicable to the position you are hoping to receive. These responsibilities and accomplishments are usually not written in complete sentences. Instead, begin each phrase with a verb that implies action (spearheaded, updated, developed, increased).

Skills

Next, include the skills that are most relevant to the position for which you are applying. These skills could include abilities in such areas as computer programs, languages, laboratory protocol, machinery, tools, or whatever areas most fit the position. If you possess multiple skills within a particular category, you may wish to use that category as a heading. For instance, you may possess skill in multiple computer programs and include these under a header entitled *Computer Skills*.

It has traditionally been suggested that résumés be confined to one page. However, two pages are acceptable if warranted by your credentials. Place the most important information on the front page, because many employers will still not read beyond the first one. Staple the pages together but include your name and a page number on the second page in case they get separated. Even people with many years of experience should be able to synthesize their credentials into two pages, so we suggest never going beyond a two-page limit.

Activities

When listing activities on your résumé, you should include those most relevant to the position first. However, in this case, feel free to also list activities that are not necessarily related to the position. Of course, you should only include those activities that reflect favorably on you, but listing activities can indicate a well-rounded person with many life experiences from which to draw when dealing with people and participating in organizational life.

Focus Questions Revisited

What are the characteristics of an interview?

Interviews are goal driven, structured, controlled, unbalanced, and feature questions and answers.

What are the types of interviews?

The following are the most common types of interviews: (1) employment interviews, (2) performance interviews, (3) exit interviews, (4) information-gaining interviews, (5) persuasive interviews, (6) problem-solving interviews, and (7) helping interviews.

What are the pre-interview responsibilities of interviewers and interviewees?

Prior to an interview, an interviewer must review application material, prepare questions and interview outline, gather material, and ensure the interview begins on time. An interviewee must gather information, prepare questions, practice, bring materials, form a professional personal appearance, and arrive on time.

How should a person begin an employment interview?

During the beginning of an interview, participants must greet one another and establish proxemics, begin to negotiate the desired relational connection and tone of the interview, and establish the purpose and agenda of the interview.

What types of questions and questioning styles may an interviewer utilize?

The different types of questions which an interviewer may ask include the following: (1) primary and secondary, (2) open and closed, and (3) neutral and leading. The interviewer may not ask questions that are potentially discriminatory. The type of control exerted by the interview can be either directive or nondirective.

How should interviewers respond to questions during an interview?

When answering the questions, interviewees should attempt to adjust the interview frame in order to view the interview as an opportunity, a learning experience, and a dialogue rather than a test, demonstration, or monologue. They should also learn from successful interviewees, who articulate clear goals; identify with employers; provide support for arguments; participate in the development of the interview; use active, concrete words; and display dynamic nonverbal communication. Interviewees should also be prepared to answer common questions asked during employment interviews and also be prepared should they be asked an illegal question.

How should a person conclude an employment interview?

When concluding an employment interview as an interviewer, you should provide a wrap-up signal, summarize the interview, ask for questions, preview future actions and schedule, extend thanks, and offer farewells. When concluding an employment interview as an interviewee, you should ask questions, reinforce qualifications and enthusiasm, inquire about the schedule if it has not been offered, extend thanks, and offer farewells.

What are the post-interview responsibilities of interviewers and interviewees?

Following an interview, an interviewer must review the job candidate, assess his or her performance, and contact the interviewee with a final decision about the position. An interviewee must assess the interview, develop a follow-up letter, and avoid irritating the interviewer.

What are a cover letter and résumé?

A cover letter declares interest in a position, summarizes qualification, focuses attention on the résumé, and requests an interview. The key features of a cover letter include (1) a focus on a specific person; (2) identification of the position; (3) a summary of qualifications and the promotion of the résumé; (4) a reaffirmation of interest and a request for an interview; and (5) a professional and respectful sign off. The purpose of a résumé is to present your credentials for a position in a clear and concise manner. The key elements of a résumé include (1) name and contact information; (2) career objective; (3) education and training; (4) experiences, (5) skills, and (6) activities.

Key Concepts

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| bi-polar questions | nondirective interviews |
| closed questions | open questions |
| cover letter | performance interviews |
| directive interviews | persuasive interviews |
| employment interviews | primary questions |
| exit interviews | probing questions |
| helping interviews | problem-solving interviews |
| information-gaining interviews | résumé |
| interview | secondary questions |
| leading questions | self-fulfilling prophecy |
| mirror questions | wrap-up signal |
| neutral questions | |

Questions to Ask Your Friends

- Ask a friend to describe his or her most recent employment interview. What aspects of the interview went well? What aspects of the interview needed improvement? Having read this chapter, provide your friend with advice about how to improve his or her performance during interviews.
- Ask a friend to participate in mock interviews with you. You should alternate between being an interviewer and being an interviewee. Evaluate your performances and pinpoint areas for improvement and development.
- Ask a friend to review your cover letter and résumé. What suggestions for improvement does he or she suggest you make?

Media Links

- Watch an interview conducted on television or available online. What open and closed questions were included? Were the questions mostly neutral or mostly leading? Were secondary questions included? Was this a directive or nondirective interview?
- Watch an interview conducted on television or available online with the sound muted. What does the nonverbal communication of the interviewer and interviewee suggest in terms of their relational connection and the tone of the interview? Next, watch the interview with the sound turned on. Does the verbal communication of the interviewer and interviewee match your perceptions of their relational connection and the tone of the interview conveyed nonverbally?
- Find a clip from *Law & Order* or another fictional program featuring a lawyer questioning a witness. Next, find a clip from a television news program in which someone is being interviewed. Finally, find a clip from a late night talk show in which a celebrity is being interviewed about his or her latest project. How would you rank these examples in terms of being directive or nondirective? What features caused you to rank them in that order?

Ethical Issues

- If an interviewee is not interested in a position and simply desires interview experience, is it ethical to take part in an interview? If an interviewer already has a job candidate selected for the position, is it ethical to interview other candidates for the position in order to simply fulfill legal or other requirements?
- Is it ethical for an interviewee to embellish his or her accomplishments during an interview? Where is the line drawn between describing accomplishments in a positive manner and fabricating these accomplishments?
- If an interviewer inadvertently asks an illegal question, should he or she be reported to the proper authorities? Is it possible to distinguish purposeful and inadvertent behavior in such situations? Should the consequences be different?

Answers to Photo Captions

Photo 16.1 ■ Information-gaining interviews are those through which an interviewer gains information from an interviewee, whereas persuasive interviews are those through which an interviewer attempts to influence the interviewee. The differences between them are not always obvious to the individual being interviewed.

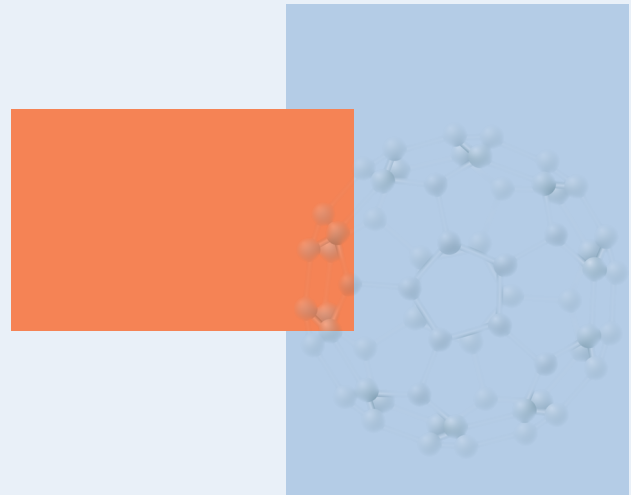
Photo 16.2 ■ In addition to reviewing a job candidate's application material prior to an interview, an interviewer must also prepare questions and an interview outline, gather materials, and ensure that the interview begins on time—so the person in the photo had better hurry up and finish that coffee!

Photo 16.3 ■ Keeping her hands clasped during the interview will likely hinder this interviewee's chances of being offered the position. Successful interviewees tend to incorporate meaningful gestures, whereas unsuccessful interviewees tend to use few gestures, or they engage in distracting mannerisms such as rubbing hands or playing with watches and jewelry.

Photo 16.4 ■ It is the responsibility of the interviewer to bring a formal end to the interview.

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Glossary

bipolar questions: closed questions that force an interviewee to select one of two responses

closed questions: questions that limit the range of an interviewee's response; contrast with *open questions*

cover letter: an employment-seeking letter declaring interest in a position, providing a summary of qualifications, compelling the person to read a resume, and requesting an interview

directive interviews: interviews characterized by great interviewer control; contrast with *nondirective interviews*

employment interviews: interviews in which a potential employer interviews a potential employee

exit interviews: interviews in which occur when a person chooses to leave a place of employment

helping interviews: interviews conducted by someone with expertise in a given area whose services are engaged by someone in need of advice

information-gaining interviews: interviews in which a person solicits information from another person

interview: a goal-driven transaction characterized by questions and answers, clear structure, control, and imbalance

leading questions: questions that suggest a preferred way to respond; contrast with *neutral questions*

mirror questions (secondary questions): paraphrases used to ensure clarification and to elicit elaboration

neutral questions: questions that provide an interviewee with no indication of a preferred way to respond; contrast with *leading questions*

nondirective interviews: interviews in which the direction of the interview is primarily given to the interviewee; contrast with *directive interviews*

open questions: questions that enable and prompt interviewees to answer in a wide range of responses; contrast with *closed questions*

performance interviews: interviews in which an individual's activities and work are discussed

persuasive interviews: interviews which have influence as the ultimate goal

primary questions: questions that introduce new topics during an interview

probing questions (secondary questions): brief statements or words that urge an interviewee to continue or to elaborate on a response

problem-solving interviews: interviews in which a problem is isolated and solutions are generated

resume: employment tool used to present credentials for a position in a clear and concise manner

secondary questions: questions that seek elaboration or further information

self-fulfilling prophecy: a perspective maintaining if someone believes a particular outcome will take place, his or her actions will often lead to its fruition

wrap-up signal: a phrase indicating the beginning of the conclusion of an interview or a public presentation

