

## Interviewing for Employment [Compliments of State Farm Insurance Companies](#)

---

[ [Before the Interview](#) | [During the Interview](#) | [After the Interview](#) ]  
[ [What Kinds are there](#) | [Interview Content](#) | [Questions](#) ]

---

The interview is the last step of the hiring process--and the most important. It offers both you and the employer the opportunity to meet one another, exchange information and come to tentative conclusions about "hiring" one another.

The interview is a two-way process. You evaluate the employer while he/she evaluates you. Since there is no one way of interviewing, you will have to develop your own style. In the short amount of time that you will spend with a potential employer, you will either be screened in or screened out, so you must project yourself in a positive, enthusiastic manner.

The interview gives the employer the opportunity to meet you in person and to evaluate the "total" you. This includes your attitude, appearance, personality, confidence, knowledge about yourself, and knowledge about the company, as well as basic ability to do the job.

### **I. BEFORE THE INTERVIEW** ([Back to top of page](#)) [ [Research](#) | [Know Yourself](#) | [Prepare Yourself](#) ]

(The interview starts long before you appear in the interviewer's office.)

#### **1. Research the Employer**

Thoroughly research the organization to impress those with whom you meet and to allow more time for you to tell your story and discuss specifics of the position. Some of the information you will want to know includes:

- size of organization
- location of facilities
- structure of organization - by product line, function, past, current & potential growth
- types of clients
- product line or service
- potential markets, products, services
- price of products or services
- present price of stock
- structure of assets
- who the competition is
- name of recruiter
- training provisions
- relocation policies
- length of time in assignments
- recent items in the news
- others you know in the organization

It is also important to research issues, trends, problems, and jargon of the field. Such information can be obtained from people in the field, company literature, public and career libraries, trade journals, newsletters, business magazines, and directories. Prepare a list of well-researched questions for the interviewer.

## 2. Know Yourself

\* Analyze your strengths and weaknesses and know exactly what you want to say and do not want to say during the interview.

\* Evaluate problem areas in your record and be prepared to offer a strong case for these during the interview, if necessary. Do not volunteer negative information about yourself or a former employment situation.

\* Write out answers to possible questions from the interviewer, as a practice activity. Do a mock interview with a staff member at OCPP, a friend, or relative.

## 3. Prepare Yourself

\* Know the name, role, and level of responsibility of each individual with whom you are to meet.

\* Know exactly how to get to the organization and be prepared to arrive early and stay late.

\* Dress to project an image of confidence and success; your total appearance should be appropriate to the job.

\* Prepare to bring additional materials to the interview such as copies of your resume, a list of references, samples of your work, or transcripts.

## II. DURING THE INTERVIEW ([Back to top of page](#))

Before the interview you should have considered WHAT you want to communicate and HOW you are going to communicate. What you will want to communicate are: personal qualities, functional skills, and special areas of knowledge that relate to the particular interviewer or organization. How you communicate those personal attributes and background facts is indicated by your attitude, non-verbal behaviors and verbal responses.

Your first task will be to help to build rapport with the interviewer(s). The characteristics of building rapport involve your (1) attitude and your (2) non-verbal and (3) verbal behaviors.

1. Your attitude should be one of openness or sensitivity to the interviewer's style and a feeling of mutual responsibility for creating a comfortable atmosphere, establishing a common ground. You should be thinking positively. (If you don't think you are the best candidate for the job, how can you hope to convince the employer you are?)
2. The non-verbal behaviors which contribute to rapport are: dress and posture, eye-contact, handshake, voice level, and gestures.
3. The verbal behaviors contributing to build rapport include: courteous observations, initiation of discussion, disclosure of personal qualities.

Be aware of your body language, how you communicate non-verbally. You will want to convey sincerity, a dedication to achievement, confidence and a high energy level. These attributes are communicated through your attitude and actions as well as through your verbal responses.

Congruence between the non-verbal and verbal messages is very important to an effective interview. The non-verbal behaviors that are important in an interview include:

- eye contact which should be open and direct when listening, asking and responding to questions. Eye contact is usually broken when concentrating or reflecting on what you want to say or what was said.

- posture which should be well balanced, erect, relaxed, straight-on and open. Know your nervous habits and practice controlling them.
- hands which should be used in a relaxed way for animation, communicating excitement, interest.
- facial expression which conveys your sincerity and can add to or detract from your words.
- voice tone which should be firm, warm, well-modulated and relaxed.
- timing which involves your use of silence, and comfort with pauses.
- active listening which affects how you respond and communicates your interest.

How you communicate verbally involves your ability:

- to use active verbs.
- to use concrete examples.
- to be concise and complete.
- to summarize and make transitions.
- to be positive and "own" what you have done and what you know.

Your knowledge of what contributes to a "strong answer" also contributes to effectiveness. A strong answer does not create more questions than it answers. The components of a strong answer include:

- backing up a statement with a specific example.
- sharing your role (the challenge and accomplishments).
- sharing the outcome or solution.
- summarizing to emphasize your strengths.

Strong answers can also be described as frank, open, thoughtful, complete, concise and "uncanned".

Be ready to ask questions from your prepared list. Techniques for asking good questions begin with the use of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Questions should be developed ahead of time and should reflect the amount of research you have done rather than your lack of research. Refer to the list of "questions to ask" to help you develop your own list.

Salary questions are usually inappropriate in the first interview, but you should research the salary range for the job/field ahead of time, consider how much the job is worth to you, and recognize that the pay raise structure of the organization is just as important as the entry level rate in assessing an offer.

Be alert to and evaluate management style, organizational structure, turnover, job responsibilities and growth potential, work atmosphere, staff/supervisor and co-worker relationships.

At the end of the interview set parameters for the next contact.

\* "When may I expect to hear from you?"

\* "What is the next step?"

### III. AFTER THE INTERVIEW ([Back to top of page](#))

- Use the interview as a learning experience. Take notes on what you would like to improve after you leave the room.
- Send a follow-up letter to thank the interviewer, and stress points in your background that qualify you for the position.
- If you are not contacted within the specified time, call to restate your interest.
- It is usually best not to accept a job offer on the spot; state your interest and appreciation for the offer and request a reasonable amount of time to consider it, e.g., several days, 1-2 weeks.
- Be sure to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it rather than afterward. Once you have accepted a position, your commitment is considered binding by the employer.

- If you do not get the job, you may want to ask the interviewer for some constructive criticism or recommendations for future interviews. If you are consistently passed over for positions, try to identify potential problems; then seek guidance for improvement.

#### IV. WHAT KINDS OF INTERVIEWS ARE THERE?

Interviews differ depending on the purpose and where they are held. On-Grounds interviews are usually half-hour interviews conducted by professional interviewers who are screening candidates for additional interviews. A positive on-Grounds interview can result in an invitation for a selection interview at the employment site. Off-Grounds interviews that you develop on your own may be very different in length and type of person interviewing you. Often these are less formal and longer. Interviews conducted at personnel offices are typically screening interviews similar to those on-Grounds, while interviews with department heads are more likely to be longer, less structured selection interviews.

##### Interview Formats

1. Screening
  - done by a person well trained in the act of interviewing.
  - purpose is to weed out candidates to cut down on work of hiring person.
  - may be brief (1/2 hour).
  - based primarily on facts - follow the interviewer's lead.
  - may be done on-campus, in personnel offices, by school systems or large companies, etc.
2. On-site (See handout on "Site Visits")
  - often involves a whole day or longer.
  - offers you opportunity to see the physical plant.
  - you will be meeting different people within the organization who will have input into the hiring decision.
3. One-on-one
  - usually with the person who will make the hiring decision.
  - 50% of supervisors who interview have no professional training in interviewing.
4. Panel
  - less subjective - better odds at overcoming an individual bias.
  - can get a better idea of how the staff works together.
  - greater chance of anxiety if you are not expecting this.
  - questions may be more rapidly paced because they can frame questions while you're answering someone else.
  - it is more difficult to achieve feelings of rapport.
  - you should maintain eye contact and involve everybody; be professional; smile. :)

#### V. INTERVIEW CONTENT ([Back to top of page](#))

Frequently, the interview progresses in stages: (1) establishing rapport, (2) obtaining data from the applicant, (3) discussing the position and the organization, describing your career objectives, asking interviewer questions, (4) closing.

The content of the interview is based on the style and priorities of the interviewer. Any or all of the approaches that follow could be used during an interview. The interviewer may want to:

1. **GATHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION**
  - a. **Objective:** To gather facts about experiences the applicant has faced (probably most common approach).
  - b. **Method:**
    1. Uses detailed questions, usually prepared in advance.
    2. Follows progression of application/resume as far as experience and education are concerned - basically an amplification of the resume.
  - c. **Pros/Cons:**

1. Yields a wealth of information (including personal) and encourages analysis of data.
  2. Can be a lengthy process as it covers candidate's life.
2. **ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION**
- a. **Objective:** To form an overall impression of the applicant.
  - b. **Method:**
    1. Avoids use of set questions.
    2. Follows in unstructured progression allowing applicant to set directions.
  - c. **Pros/Cons:**
    1. Lack of set questions - may not cover significant portion of candidate's background.
    2. Emphasis is on analysis of impressions, not facts.
3. **CREATE STRESS**
1. **Objective:** To "test" reactions of applicant in a difficult situation.
  2. **Method:** Puts applicant on the defensive by interrupting, criticizing opinions, questioning decisions, etc.
  3. **Pros/Cons:**
    1. Fallen out of favor although once used by major corporations.
    2. Interview situation is already "stress".
4. **ASK PROBING/HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS**
- **Objective:** To evaluate probable job performance or technical knowledge of the applicant.
  - a. **Method:**
    1. Asks hypothetical questions (what would you do if?) related to job performance based on candidate's concepts or attitudes of what it takes to do a given job.
    2. Asks for solutions, recommendations.
    3. Requires a set of situations carefully prepared in advance.
  - b. **Pros/Cons:**
    1. Does not give a broad range of personality characteristics.
    2. Requires a skilled interviewer.
5. **ASSESS PAST BEHAVIORS**
- **Objective:** To identify characteristics and uncover competencies of the applicant, leaving the interviewer to draw conclusions and evaluate what the applicant is likely to do in certain situations.
  - a. **Methods:**
    1. Asks questions that will reveal what the applicant has actually done, focusing on both positive and negative experiences.
    2. Concentration on in-depth description to which the interviewer will compare the candidate's qualifications.
  - b. **Pros/Cons:**
    1. Requires employer to establish beforehand "model" descriptions to which he/she will compare the candidate's qualifications.
    2. Requires careful formulation of questions so that all areas of model are covered.

Two new types of interview style, case interviewing and behavioral interviewing, are becoming very popular in certain industries. Behavioral interviewing is addressed in *Hot Tips, Sneaky Tricks and Last-Ditch Tactics* by Jeff Speck; case interviewing is covered in Marc Cosentino's *The Harvard College Guide to Consulting* (both books available in the OCPP library).

## VI. QUESTIONS ([Back to top of page](#))

[ [You ask Employers](#) | [About Yourself](#) | [Career Goals/Plan](#) | [School](#) ]  
 [ [Previous Experience](#) | [Specific to Company/Job](#) | [Problem Questions](#) ]

### QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK EMPLOYERS (Use only if applicable to your situation)

Your research of an organization or position may not provide all of the information that you will need before you take a job. Listed below are sample questions that may be asked during the interview to

supplement your research. Avoid asking questions that begin with "is", "are", and "do". These questions lead to yes/no answers. Instead, begin your questions with who, what, when, where, why, how, etc.

- How would you describe the duties of the position?
- How would you describe a typical day in this position?
- How much travel is normally expected?
- How frequently do you relocate professional employees?
- Why are you looking to fill this position? (Is it a newly created job? Did the previous employee leave? Why?)
- How many people have had this position and where have they gone?
- What is the average stay in this position?
- Outside my department, who else will I work with?
- How much evening or weekend work is expected?
- How high a priority is this department within the organization?
- What are the prospects for advancement beyond this level?
- How does one advance in the organization?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- How often do the training programs begin?
- About how many individuals go through your training program each year?
- How does your company's tuition reimbursement program work?
- What new product lines/services have been announced recently?
- What is the average age of top management?
- Will you describe \_\_\_\_\_ to me? (The personality of a ranking officer often reveals a lot about the company philosophy).
- Could you tell me about public transportation to your company?
- How many people are you interviewing for this position?
- What are the things you like least/most about working here?
- If I am extended an offer of employment, how soon after this would you like me to start?
- What can I tell you about my qualifications?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

### **QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED IN THE INTERVIEW**

The best questions to ask are those which begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how. Please attend to those "lead" words as you ask and answer questions in the interview.

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you consider to be one of your weaknesses (strengths)?
3. What can you do that someone else can't do?
4. What qualifications do you have that indicate you will be successful in your field? How would they relate to our position? What do you have to offer?
5. What are your own special abilities?
6. What new skills or capabilities have you developed over the past year?
7. What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
8. What are your greatest work and non-work accomplishments during the past two years?
9. Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.
10. What motivates you?
11. What have you been doing since your graduation from college? Since you left your last job?
12. How would a co-worker, or friend, or boss describe you?
13. What are your interests outside of work, school?
14. What qualities do you admire most in others?
15. How would you describe your own work style?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CAREER GOALS OR PLANS**

1. What would you like to be doing five (ten) years from now?
2. What type of position are you interested in?
3. What are your salary requirements--short term/long term?
4. What is success? What personal characteristics will contribute to your success?
5. How will employment with us contribute to your career plans?
6. What do you expect from a job?
7. What are your career objectives - short and long range?
8. This job is a total change from previous employment. How does it fit your career goals?
9. What are your location preferences?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL EDUCATION**

1. How does your education relate to this position (or how does your education prepare you for this position)?
2. What activities did you engage in at school?
3. What classes did you like most in school? Least? Why?
4. Why did you decide to go to \_\_\_\_\_ school?
5. Why did you choose your major?
6. Describe your academic strengths and weaknesses?
7. What are your plans for continuing your education?
8. What career related skills do you possess as a result of your academic preparation?
9. What have you read recently in your field?

### **PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE QUESTIONS**

1. What have you learned from your past jobs?
2. How often, and in what way, did you communicate with your subordinates and superiors?
3. What were the biggest pressures on your last job?
4. How did your job description for your last job change while you held it?
5. What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
6. How does your previous experience relate to this position?
7. Why did you leave your last job?
8. What did you like most/least about your last job?
9. Whom may we contact for references?

### **QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE COMPANY/JOB**

1. Why should we hire you?
2. Why do you want to work here?
3. What do you know about this organization?
4. What salary do you expect?
5. Why do you think you would like this type of position? Company?
6. What kind of boss do you like to work for?
7. How long do you intend to stay here?
8. What do you think determines a person's progress in an organization?
9. What interests you about our product or service? How would you improve it?
10. What do you think would be your greatest contribution to our operation?
11. How do you solve problems?
12. When can you start to work?
13. Can you travel overnight?

### **PROBLEM QUESTIONS**

1. "Tell me about yourself."

This question is asked to find out about your job skills. Answer it by describing your best qualifications for the job. Be specific and use examples to support your claim.

2. "What is your major weakness?"

Never be negative. Rather, turn any negative issue or weakness into a positive statement or strength. Examples:

- "I'm often too careful about my work. Sometimes I work late to get my job done right."
  - "I tend to ask questions about what I am told to do so I can be sure I will do it right."
3. "How much do you expect to be paid?"

Never state a flat dollar amount unless you know what the job pays. Try a neutral statement: "I would expect to be paid what other persons in this job are paid" or state a range that you know would encompass any offer, but which goes a bit higher than you would find acceptable. Or answer with a question: "How much does the job pay?" "How much is a new employee usually paid?" If you have experience: "How much do you usually pay someone with my experience?" Emphasize your skills, and ask the employer what he or she feels your skills are worth.

4. "Why do you want to work for this company?"

The employer expects you to show knowledge of and interest in the company. You can do this with an answer that indicates that you have researched the company before the interview. Example: "I've talked with some of your employees and they feel that this is a good company to work for because..." "I have been reading that your company is really growing fast. I want to work for your company because the future looks promising."

5. "Why did you leave your last job?"

The employer is trying to find out if you had any problems on your last job.

- Never say anything negative about yourself or your previous employer. If you did have problems think of a way to explain without being negative.
  - Don't use the word fired. Use words such as "laid off" or "position was cut".
  - If you were fired and are not on good terms with your previous employer, maybe you should explain. Try to show that you learned something from the situation.
  - Tell the employer that the former problem (if it is personal) will not affect your work.
  - Common reasons for leaving: general layoff, job was temporary, moved to a new area, company went out of business, no room for advancement, wanted a job that would better use your skills.
6. "What are your future plans?"

Interviewer may want to know if you are ambitious, plan ahead, or set goals for yourself. The interviewer may also want to know what kind of expectations you have of the company. Examples: "I hope to become very good at my job and perhaps take some schooling to become better. I understand the company will pay the cost of schooling if it is relevant."

## **VII. RESOURCES AT OCPP**

The interview is often a tense situation. The better prepared you are the better you will perform. In addition to this handout we provide:

1. Mock interview, in which you can be interviewed and videotaped by an OCPP counselor, then critiqued. (Make appointments with the receptionist).
2. On-Grounds Interview Demonstration videotapes.
3. Face to Face videotape series featuring live interviews for the following career fields: consumer marketing, retailing, computer science, commercial banking, and teaching.
4. Books on interviewing/job search skills. The best books on the interview are *Sweaty Palms* by H. Anthony Medley and *Hot Tips, Sneaky Tricks, and Last Ditch Tactics* by Jeff Speck.

