

# Interview Success

Career Development Centre  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
2011- 2012

# Outline

**Learning Objectives**

**Pre-Session Exercise**

**Part I – Before the Interview**

**Part II – During the Interview**

**Part III – Interview Follow –up**

# Learning Objectives

- **Recognize** common interview pitfalls
- **Understand** how to prepare pre-interview
- **Discover** the importance of follow-up
- Awareness of interview preparation resources

# Top Interview Questions

1

**“Tell me about yourself.”**

# Top Interview Questions

**2**  
**“What are your weaknesses?”**

# The Job Interview

Think of the job interview as a Meeting

- The purpose is to find out whether or not there is a **suitable match** between your needs and skills, and the needs and opportunities of the employer



# The Candidate/Job With the best “Fit”

- ‘Fit’ refers to more than the list of requested qualifications
- ‘Fit’ refers to the proper qualities that fit the needs of the team/culture of the organization

**The interview is an opportunity for you to begin to discover if there is a match between the job, team, organization and your needs**

# Common Interview Pitfalls

What do you think are some common interview errors or pitfalls?

- Being too vague
- Talking too much
- Dressing down
- Not asking questions
- Bringing up topics of salary/negotiation
- Projecting lack of career clarity
- Absence of job specific knowledge
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Forgetting to follow-up
- “Trash talking”

# Employers say...

- ...not personable, enthusiastic and conversational
- ...does not know why he or she wants the job
- ...does not know anything about the company
- ...cannot articulate why they're a good candidate for the position
- ...does not have any questions to ask the interviewer

**5 Reasons cited by employers  
as to why students don't get hired after an interview  
(Career Insider)**

# **Part I – Before the Interview**

# Interview Preparation

## Key Areas of Research

- Yourself & Your Skills
- The Career/Job
- The Employer

# Research: Yourself

## How well do you know yourself?

1. Identify, assess and understand what you are offering an employer
2. Compile a comprehensive list of your:
  1. Skills – Hard and Soft
  2. Experiences
  3. Qualifications
3. Be prepared to discuss these in depth

# Research Your Skills

**Hard skills** are specific or tangible skills that can be measured – examples include:

- Years of Experience
- Education/Certification
- Artistic/Musical Skills
- Computer Skills  
(Programs/Hardware/Software)
- Knowledge of specific methods or procedures
- Physical abilities  
(strength, dexterity, speed)
- Mechanical/technical knowledge
- Languages  
(written/verbal)
- Specialized Training

# Research Your Skills

**Soft skills** are intangible and not easily measurable – Examples include:

- Communication (written/oral)
- Ability to learn
- Responsibility/Maturity
- Analytical/Logical abilities
- Leadership
- Decision-making
- Tact/Diplomacy
- Negotiation/Consultation
- Adaptability
- Positive Attitude
- Initiative/Innovation
- Team Work/Collaboration
- Interpersonal Abilities
- Presentation/Public Speaking
- Co-ordination/Planning

# Presenting Your Skills

## Focus on Transferable Skills

- Review and select 5-6 key skills/qualifications
- Identify and understand underlying components of each skill (layers)
- Identify past achievements where your skills have been effective
- Provide insight into how you would use your skills on the actual job

**How can you demonstrate your skills effectively?**

# Layer Your Skills

e.g., Communication



Clients

Presentations

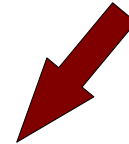
Engaging



Warm



Develop Rapport



Responsive to  
an Audience



Multi-Media Skills

# Layer Your Skills



# Research The Career/Job

**How much do you know about the  
Career Field or Industry?**

**Identify, Assess and Understand** the Career Area/Job

Research and review the following:

1. **Hard** and **Soft** Skill Requirements
2. Daily Tasks and Responsibilities
3. Affiliations

**Be prepared to demonstrate  
your understanding of the career/job**

# Research the Employer

**How well do you know the Employer?**

**Identify, Assess and Understand** the Employer

Research and review the following employer information:

1. History/Current Status
2. Products/Services
3. Industry/Sector (including Key Competitors)
4. Global/National/Local Presence
5. Culture/Environment

# Research Resources

- Employer Websites (Press/News Releases)
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Linked In
- Magazines/Newspapers
- Career Events
- Professional Associations
- ASK program
- Marketline & Scott's Directories (<http://library.wlu.ca>)
- Similar Organizations (in other cities)
- Public Libraries

# Prepare Your Agenda

**Your agenda should be comprised of five or more key points you want to communicate to the employer during the interview:**

Your Agenda Should Include:

- Relevant Skills/Qualifications
- Key Experiences and Achievements
- Knowledge of the Company/Industry
- Questions to ask the Interviewer

# **Part II – The Interview**

# Common Questions

## Interview Demonstration

**What were some strengths?**

**Areas needing improvement?**

# Common Opener

## The Opener – “Tell me about yourself?”

- Interviewers are looking for professional information, education, experience and activities (not personal details)
- Begin with a tangible time period and tell the interviewer what path took you to the current opportunity
- The answer should take approx 45 seconds and include only the **highlights** of your journey!
- Use this opportunity to set an agenda to build upon throughout the interview

# Common Questions

## What do you see as your Key Strengths/Skills?

- Identify 3-4 Strengths (Hard and Soft Skills)
- Select relevant, non-generic skills
- List the 'main' skills you are going to discuss first, then discuss them one at a time, connecting them to the job:

“The three keys skills I would like to focus on are my excellent communication skills, organization and decision making skills. Specifically, in terms of my communications skills, my ability to...e.g., generate rapport with clients and develop and deliver effective presentations to different audiences would be very relevant to this job...in the past I used my communications skills to...in the current job I would be able to...”

# Common Questions

## “What do you consider to be your Weakness?”

- **Avoid** a ‘fake’ weakness!
- Identify a weaknesses that is “**trainable**” not a **character trait**
- If you have an obvious weakness – address it
  - Computer program (e.g.) Quattro Pro
  - New products and services of the organization
  - New to a location, sector or industry
  - Practices, clients and competitors of an organization
- Be **brief** and indicate how you will address the weakness

# Common Questions

## “Why have you chosen this career path?”

- Begin with identifying experiences that have tweaked your interest in this field
- Do not reveal any uncertainty toward the role; employers are concerned about retention
- Consider adding a statement about how your skills are a good match for the demands of the job

# Common Questions

**“What do you know about our organization?”**

- Demonstrate that you have researched the organization (history, mission/mandate, products/services)
- Identify what resources you utilize to keep tabs on the organization (E-mail alerts, Blogs)

# Common Questions

## “What are your Salary Expectations?”

- Demonstrate credibility by knowing a realistic and appropriate salary range (LMI; [salaryexpert.com](http://salaryexpert.com); ASK)
- Redirect the question (‘What were you considering would be a fair salary range based on my level of knowledge, training, and experience?’)

# Other Common Questions

**What are your career goals?**

(Hint: make them relevant)

**What do you think about recent changes in this field or where do you see this field heading?**

(Hint: do your homework)

# Common Types of Questions

## Behaviour-Based (Situational)

- Interview involves using past experiences as predictors of future performance
- Examples include – “Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult situation or person” or “Tell me about a time you had to make a decision/solve a problem”

## Competency-Based

- A competency interview involves identifying and/or discussing a set of competencies (skills) that have been selected by the employer as being necessary for success on the job
- Examples include – “Tell me **how** you would use your XYZ skills, or “Tell us what you see as the ‘core competencies’ required to do X”

# Prepare STARR Examples in advance

**One STARR example for each key skill required:**

**S – Situation** -Describe the setting/situation/problem

**T – Task** -Indicate what needed to be accomplished

**A – Action** -Detail the actions you took. Describe your thought or decision-making process

**R – Result** -Outline positive results and benefits

**R – Relevant** -Demonstrate your understanding of the relevance of the example to the job

**Rehearse**, but do not memorize your STARR responses!

# Responding to Questions

## To effectively answer behaviour-based or competency questions:

- Draw upon past experiences and use a STARR format
- Avoid including too many details or being too vague
- Describe your thought process/actions step- by- step
- Clearly & concisely indicate the skills you used
- For negative outcomes, indicate what you learned or what you would do differently

# Questions for the Interviewer

## What questions might you ask an interviewer?

- Do not ask superficial questions
- Always prepare 5-8 questions which demonstrate your familiarity with the organization/industry
- Focus on the future e.g. training/project opportunities, your role, your supervisor, team philosophy, primary initial duties, work environment, company direction
- Do not ask about salary and benefits
- Be respectful of the time - do not ask too many questions, especially if the interview is running late

## **Part III – Interview Follow - up**

# After the Interview

- At the end of the interview, thank each interviewer, shake hands again, and say something positive about the experience
- Inquire about “next steps” in the process
- Immediately following the interview, ensure that you have the titles and proper spelling of each of the interviewer’s names (e.g., request business cards)

**Why do you need this information?**

# Follow- Up

- Within 24-48 hours of the interview, you should have provided the interviewers with formal thank-you letters

## **To whom and how do you send your thank-you letters?**

- Personalize letter to each interviewer (if less than three)
- If interviewed by a panel, send letters to your key contact and any senior interviewers (e.g., Manager, VP, Director)
- Know the preferences of the recipients – e.g., personal letter, email, phone call depending on the culture of the organization

# If you haven't heard a response...

- ...within 10 days, you can follow up with a phone call
- ...indicate that you are checking on the **status** of their decision (do not request the decision over the phone)
- ...even if you are not the successful candidate, thank the employer for the opportunity and ask if you may contact them again in the future

**Do not burn bridges – you may not have been the person who  
fit the current job,  
but things may change and there may be other similar or  
new opportunities!**

# Career Resources

- Book an **interview coaching** or a **practice interview appointment**. **Call ext. 4495**
- Visit [www.wlu.ca/career](http://www.wlu.ca/career) to access
  - Career Workshops
  - Employment Guidebooks
  - Schedule of Career and Employment Events

[www.lauriercareercentre.wordpress.com](http://www.lauriercareercentre.wordpress.com)

# Thank You

- Complete and submit – **Learning Objectives**
- Stamp – **Career Development Certificate**

**“Luck prefers the prepared”**

**–Louis Pastuer**