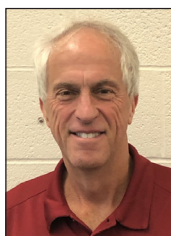


# 8 Parts to a Great Interview



**Douglas K. Barney**  
Professor of Accountancy  
Indiana University SE



**Michael Wieck**  
Assistant Professor of Accounting  
Indiana University SE

**W**hether you are on the job market now or will be in the next few years, we offer advice you can use to win a great professional position. A good interview can put you in the running for a position. There is an adage in industry, “Your resume gets you the interview, but your interview gets you the job.” Here are suggestions for an interview. For more information, check the internet (e.g., Indeed.com) or your campus career development office.

## Appearance

Professional attire has relaxed over the years, but interviews are still formal for the interviewee. It may not be expected for interviewees to wear a suit but wearing a conservative suit will not hurt and typically makes the best impression. Dress appropriately whether the first interview is F2F or virtual. Interviewers will expect you to dress professionally either way and dressing professionally will bolster your confidence. However, if you do not wear a suit, and one is expected, you will look unprepared for the position. When

picking your attire, think conservatively. For example, a dark suit with a light shirt and simple tie (for men) will convey professionalism. This isn’t time to win a fashion contest. You don’t win a job with your attire, but you can lose the job. If you cannot afford professional attire, there are organizations that make apparel available at a reduced price. Goodwill, for example, sells lots of used professional clothing. Dress For Success provides professional apparel for low-income women. Arrive neat and clean. Uncombed hair, bad breath, and dirty clothing will always make a bad impression.

Posture is an important part of appearance. Your parents were right: Stand up straight! Standing and sitting straight conveys confidence, as does good manners. Be polite and respectful to everyone you meet. You never know the influence a person has in an office. Addressing interviewers as Mr. or Ms. followed by their last names is proper until you get to know them better or they suggest a more familiar salutation. Once working for a company, most people greet each other by their first names,

but you do not work for the company yet. Err on the side of being polite and respectful.

## Opening and Closing

Conversation during the middle of the interview may go well but opening and closing the interview can be tricky. Most people will form an impression of you quickly. Once they form that impression, they may be reluctant to change their impression of you. It is therefore imperative to present your best first impression.

Arrive early for the interview. For a F2F interview, if you have not been to the interview location, consider driving there the day before to make sure you can find it. Plan to arrive about 15 minutes early. If you arrive sooner than that, simply wait in your car until you can walk in about 15 minutes early. For a virtual interview ensure that your computer is working properly, you have an appropriate setting, and then login in a couple minutes early. The interviewer will join you or admit you at the appointed time. If you arrive late for an interview, you are almost guaranteed not to get the job.

Introduce yourself with confidence. Tell the interviewer your name, unless you are very familiar with the interviewer. Maintain eye contact, including while you shake hands. Give a firm handshake, although Covid restrictions may amend that decision to an elbow bump. A firm handshake makes a good first impression. You want to provide solid pressure without hurting the other person.

Closing the interview can be awkward. Take your lead from the interviewer. If the interviewer asks if you have any more questions, do not say 'no,' or 'you answered all my questions.' Have some relevant questions. It's ok to repeat questions to different people. That technique might be highly informative as different people may give you different answers to the same questions. Communicate that you have seriously considered what it would be like to work for the firm. For example, you can ask what a typical day is like, when busy season is, and the expectations during busy season. The answers to these questions can vary greatly between firms and employees.

### Preparation

Research the firm and open position. The quickest way to make interviewers angry is to show up for an interview or other company function and not know anything about their firm or position. Information about the company and the open position is typically available through the internet. (e.g the company website) Still, researching the firm is not enough. Last year one of our students had what she thought was an excellent interview at a local CPA firm but did not receive a second interview. Follow-up with the recruiter revealed that the recruiter was disappointed our student had entered the interview without researching the firm. The student said she thoroughly researched the firm, but the topic never came up in the interview. The moral of the story for you is researching the firm alone is not enough. Work your knowledge of the firm into the interview. Ask informed questions; bring up firm-relevant topics in the interview; ask questions about position responsibilities. You should try to communicate to your interviewers that you want to receive this position.

### Verbal Skills

How you deliver your comments is just as important as what you deliver. Interviewers want to know if you can professionally communicate your ideas. This means you should make concise presentations with appropriate physical gestures. However, your physical movements should not de-

tract from your delivery.

Use proper grammar. Improper grammar or colloquialisms may cause you to lose the offer. For example, saying 'Me and Dave went to town' might be acceptable grammar some places, but not in a business setting. Examine the speech of professional speakers and newscasters. If you have doubts about your verbal skills, get some training or study a book on proper speech. Using software, such as Grammarly, can help you correct poor grammar.

Accept grammar advice gracefully. One of our graduates was making a presentation to a group of co-workers and clients and used the wrong word repeatedly. When corrected by a supervisor, she did not take the advice well. The supervisor was more concerned about her reaction to his comments than her grammar. Her reaction hindered her career at the firm.

### Direction

Have you thought about your career, both in the short term and the long term? Recruiters will ask. While it is



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not necessary to have concrete plans, it is a good idea to have some career direction. Most of us change career paths. The point is whether you have thought about career goals. 'If you don't know where you are going any road will take you there.' Alternatively, having well-defined realistic goals shows confidence in your abilities.

### Maturity

Do you take responsibility for your decisions and actions? Everyone makes mistakes; Taking responsibility for mistakes is a sign of maturity. Self-reliant, decisive employees mean less management is necessary for those employees, which is a big plus in the workplace. An individual we interviewed explained her numerous moves among employers as her looking for a 'good fit.' Another way to state that is 'She did not fit in well.' She continued by explaining what was wrong with each of those workplaces. She did not get an offer from us.

If you can't say anything nice about a previous employer, say nothing at all. If asked why you are looking for a new position, focus on the opportunities offered at the new firm instead of issues with the prior employer. For example, college students are expected to leave entry-level positions for professional positions. You do not have to explain the issues with your prior position.

### Personality

Enthusiasm and energy will help you win that position. If, however, this enthusiasm is not genuine you and your potential employer may be misled into an inappropriate decision. Firms are looking to hire for the long term. They want to hire

people they would like to have as co-workers. You will be happier working at a firm where you fit in well. Therefore, when you interview, be genuine, so that the firm and you can see if there is a good fit for your personality. When interviewing, you can show enthusiasm by sitting up straight and leaning forward slightly. Show interest in the conversation, but don't interrupt your interviewers. The best interviews we have observed were two-way conversations. Answer the questions the interviewers have, but also work your questions into the conversation.

### Qualifications

Qualifications include what you have done in your career to this point. There is not much you can do now to change that grade in introductory accounting, but how you have performed since then and how you present your qualifications takes on considerable importance.

Qualifications are key to earning that position. Ensure that you have the proper qualifications for the position before applying. If you don't and you still apply, make sure you are ready to explain why you are qualified for the position.

While having the proper qualifications is vital, you must also present your qualifications appropriately for the recruiters reviewing your application materials. When building your resume, put the most important facts at the top and do not pack your resume with unnecessary information. Don't try to win over the recruiter with a fancy resume. They will not hire you because your resume has a cute border, and this might detract from the resume content. Your resume should fill an en-

tire page, but it should not exceed a page until you have ten years of professional work experience. As you gain professional experience, remove the entry-level positions you worked in high school and college. Once you have quality professional experience, tailor your resume to the position.

For an accounting student's resume, list your major, expected graduation year and month, when you will earn 150 credit hours (if you plan to sit for the CPA exam), and your GPA. Your resume is a sales document. You should present your qualifications in the best light. For example, if your overall GPA is less than a 3.0, but your Accounting GPA is 3.5 it would be appropriate to emphasize your accounting GPA. If you earned a C in Introductory Accounting, but you have performed exceedingly well in accounting since, emphasize later performance on your resume. You could, for example, list your GPA on your resume for the last 60 credit hours. Sell your qualifications but tell the truth.

### Overall

Completing a great interview is important, even if you later determine the position is not right for you. Leave the interviewer with a positive impression. Your paths may cross in the future, or you may find that company is a good fit later in your career. Building bridges and leaving doors open is a smart career move. Now go forth and 'Break a Leg.'