

Interview Preparation

Faculty of Social Work
Employment Preparation Series

Career Development Centre
2013

Learning Objectives

Interview Preparation Strategies

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

Reframing the Job Interview

Think of the job interview as a **meeting**

Purpose: to find out whether or not there is a **suitable match** between your needs and skills and the needs of the employer

Are you the '**right fit**'?



Fit is “it”

More than the list of requested qualifications...‘Fit’ refers to the proper qualities that match the needs of the employer, clients, team, culture and agency

The interview is also an opportunity for you to discover or confirm if there is a match between the position, agency, client base, values and your needs.



EXERCISE – Role Play

How interview ready are you?

- Identify a partner
- Choose who will be the interviewer first
- Interviewers:
Prepare to ask this #1 asked interview question...

So, tell me
ABOUT
yourself

Tips for your response

- **Purpose**

- Set the tone of the interview (first impression)
- Set the agenda for the interview

- **Preparation**

- Strategically identify what you want to include:
 - education/qualifications
 - experience/strengths
 - enthusiasm/research

- **Practice...**

Practice!

- **Begin** by selecting a relevant time period that enables you to highlight your background and qualifications
- **Focus** on **professional** not **personal** information
- **End (within 60 seconds!)** by explaining why you are interested in and suited to this specific opportunity (a.k.a. **FIT**)
- **Avoid the Common Interview Pitfalls...**

Common Interview Pitfalls

As Cited by Employers

- Being too vague
- Talking too much
- Dressing down
- Not asking questions
- Bringing up topics of salary/negotiation
- Poor etiquette (e.g. cell phone)
- Projecting lack of career clarity
- Absence of job specific knowledge
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Not following up
- “Trash talking”

So how can you avoid these pitfalls?

Interview Preparation

- **Part I – Before the Interview**
- **Part II – During the Interview**
- **Part III – Interview Follow-up**

Part I – Before the Interview



Recall...

A successful **job search** begins with a clear understanding of:

- Who you are... Self Awareness**
- What you are looking for... Career Awareness**
- Who they are... Employer Awareness**

**This is also the foundation of
a successful interview.**

Self-Awareness

1. Identify, assess and be able to articulate what you uniquely have to offer an employer or contribute in their environment
2. Compile a comprehensive list of your:
 1. Skills – Technical and Transferable
 2. Experiences
 3. Qualifications
3. Be prepared to discuss these in depth

Ensure that your online image supports your professional image!

Research Your Skills

Technical skills –

Specific skills and training required for a role;
(usually) competency can be objectively measured.

- 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
- Language Proficiency
- Specialized Training
(e.g. CBT, NVC, Anti-Oppression...)

Research Your Skills

Transferable skills –

Versatile skills that can be applied in a number of different roles; usually assessed subjectively

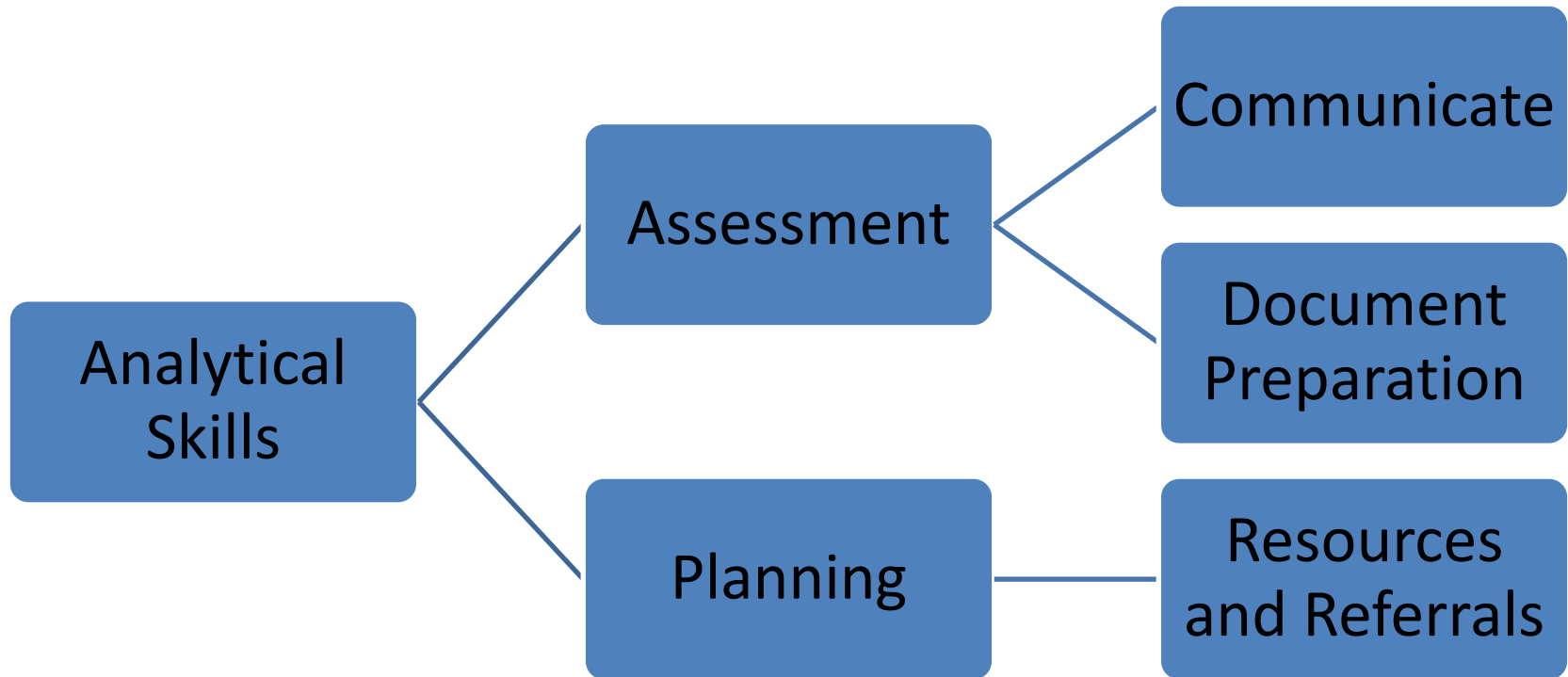
- Communication
- Observation/Assessment
- Analytical/logical
- Leadership
- Decision making
- Tact/diplomacy
- Negotiation
- Consultation
- Interpersonal competence
- Adaptability
- Influence
- Optimism
- Intuitive innovation
- Problem solving
- Collaboration
- Coordination/planning
- Presentation
- Intercultural sensitivity

Identify skills required...and relevance

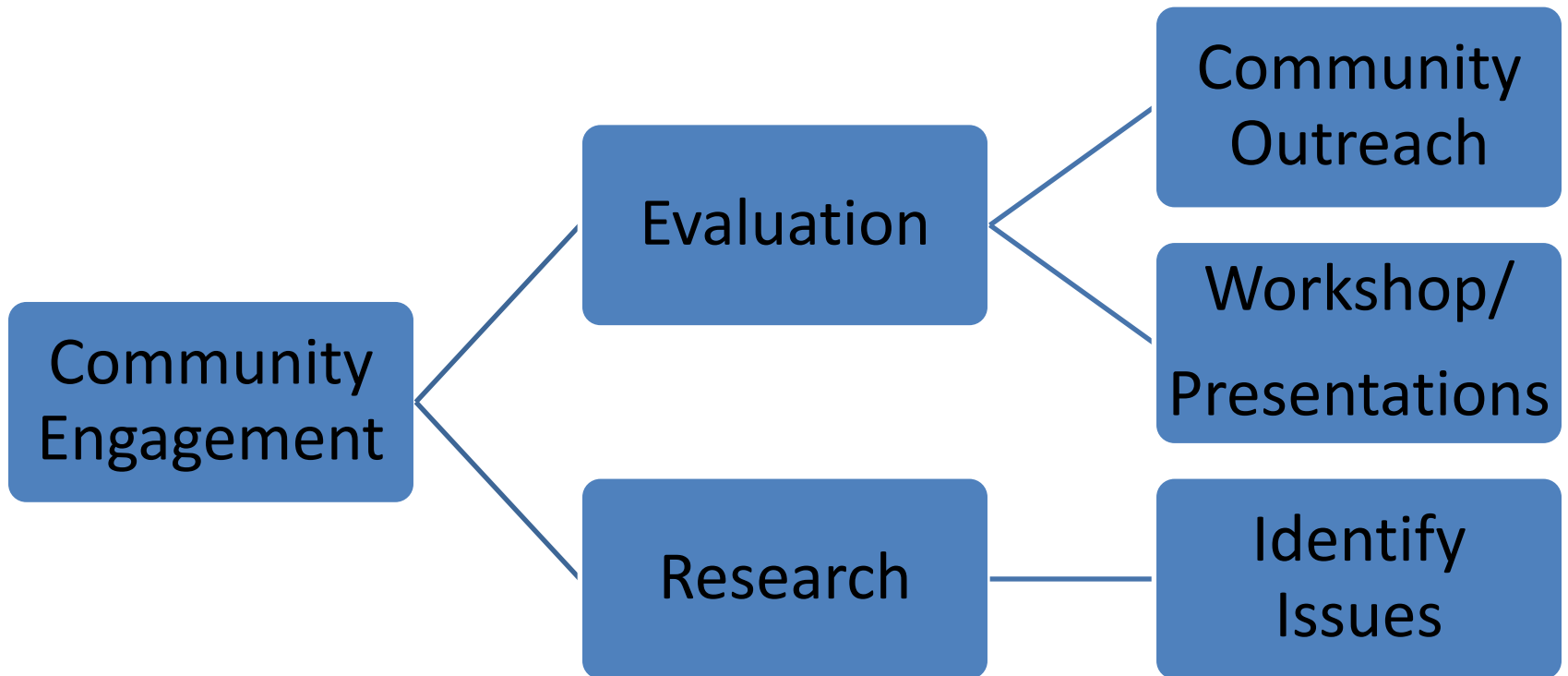
A **required skill** may be the same for many roles but their **use, application** and **degree of value** are quite different.

e.g. A marketing analyst and a social worker both require “analytical skills”

Know How You Use Your Skills



Know How You Use Your Skills



Understand the Key Skills Required

Analytical skills

Assessment

Rapport building

Community programming

Leadership

Rapport-building

Collaboration

Presentation

Motivation

Consultation

Counselling etc.

Identify how you
will use these
skills in the role...

Career Awareness

e.g. Requirements for a teaching related role may include –

- Classroom Management
- Teaching/Learning Strategies
- Program Planning, Assessment and Evaluation
- Learning Community/Areas of Specialization

Career Awareness

Be prepared to discuss in an interview –

The specific job

Identify, assess and understand what the job really involves

Your observations of your field

– **Research and review key -**

- **Requirements**
- **Activities**
- **Trends**
- **Affiliations**

Employer Awareness

How well do you **really** know the employer?

Research and review the prospective employer, agency or institution information -

- History/Current Status
- Programs/Services + Reputation
- Niche/Industry/Sector (including competitors)
- Global/National/Local Presence
- Culture/Environment
- Partners or clientele

Resources for Research

- ✓ **The Internet**
 - The Employers Website (Media Releases)
 - Blogs
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
- ✓ **The regional “Blue Book”**
- ✓ **Chamber of Commerce**
- ✓ **Magazines/Newspapers**
- ✓ **Career Events**
- ✓ **Professional Associations**
- ✓ **Alumni and ASK Program (www.wlu.ca/career)**
- ✓ **Similar organizations (in other cities)**
- ✓ **Call the organization and request an informational interview***

***Informational Interviews**
prior to applications
continue to be a leading source for obtaining insights and referrals

Now... Create your Interview Agenda

- Identify key points you want to communicate to the employer during the interview
- These should include:
 - **Relevant skills and qualifications**
 - **Key experiences**
 - **Relevant achievements**
 - **Future aspirations (related)**
 - **Questions for the employer**

How will I distinguish myself in a positive and memorable way from other candidates?

Interview Professionalism

Interview professionalism includes:

- Confirmation contact
- Attire selection
- Pre-Arrival planning
- Interview-ready portfolio
- Arrival and business etiquette

Interview Professionalism

Confirmation Contact

- Establish key contact name/number
- Re-confirm interview logistics:
e.g. Time, duration, location, parking
- Obtain names & titles of all interviewees
- Verify interview format(s)



Interview Professionalism

Attire

- Know the standard for the organization
- Dress (appropriately) above the standard
- Look well rested, neatly groomed, energetic and confident
- Be a minimalist –
Carry only one briefcase or portfolio



Interview Professionalism

Pre-arrival planning

- Plan transportation and parking ahead of time (rehearse commute if possible!)
- Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the interview
- Minimize “day-of” distractions (i.e. ensure gas tank is full, pre-purchase bus tickets, have change for parking etc.)



Interview-ready Portfolio

- Reference letters
- Performance evaluations
- Awards/Certificates
- Work Samples
(e.g. programs or educational material developed or managed)
- Contact card
- Copy of job description
- Cover letter
- Up-to-date résumé
- Your interview agenda
- List of questions for the interviewer(s)
- Pad of paper
- Pen



Interview Professionalism

Arrival

- Greet the receptionist and formally introduce yourself
- Remove outerwear immediately
- Do not eat or drink while waiting (except water)
- Do not speak on the phone while waiting

Part II – During The Interview



Types of Questions

1. Baseline – Open ended

skills · strengths · weaknesses

2. Behavioural-based (a.k.a. Situational)

Past performance predicts future performance

Tell me about a time when...

Describe a situation that...

3. Competency-based (a.k.a. Hypothetical)

Identify and/or discuss the competency (skills)

How would you approach...

Describe the core skills required to...

Case-Scenarios

Baseline Questions

“Tell me about your strengths...”

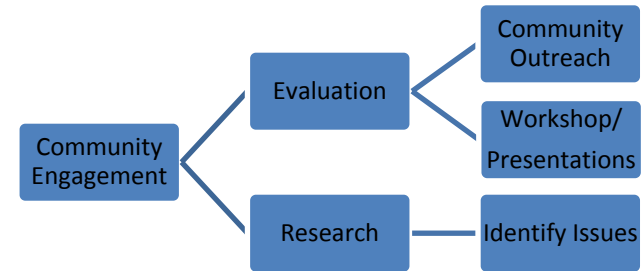
- Focus on 3-5 Core Competencies
- Prepare 2 STARR examples for each

“I have excellent counselling skills: specifically my ability to generate rapport with volatile clients has been very effective. For example,...”

Responding to Baseline Questions

Focus on **Transferable Skills**:

- Begin with generic skill/competency/qualification
- Articulate the underlying sub-skills
- Describe how you have used or would use these skills on the job
- Share your past achievements related to the skill



EXERCISE – Role Play

How interview ready are you?

- Identify a partner
- Choose who will be the interviewer first
- Interviewers:
Prepare to ask this #2 most frequently asked question...

What are your weaknesses?



Tell me about your weaknesses..

- **Avoid** a 'fake' weakness or a 'real' personality trait!
- Identify a **trainable skill** (professional) not a **character trait** (personal)
- If you have an **obvious weakness or gap** that is apparent from your resumé – address how you plan to resolve it.
 - New to the agency, client group or community/region
 - Unfamiliar approach or team culture/environment
 - Limited experience in a relevant curriculum or program area
- Be **brief and solution-focused**

Behavioural or Situational Questions

“What was/is your approach to ...”

- Clearly articulate step-by-step your style
- Do not list theoretical frameworks!
- Focus on **practical** and **applied** knowledge and processes
- Demonstrate how your strengths enable you to address the situation

**e.g. You have a non-communicative client.
How would you work with this client?**

Approaching Answers

- Draw upon your past experiences
- Be systematic, concise & analytical
- Focus on 'lessons learned' and possible future approaches
- Connect all your responses to relevance to the target position
- Consider the **STARR** response ...

The STARR Response

S	Situation	Describe the setting/situation (briefly)
T	Task	Indicate what needed to be accomplished
A	Action	Detail the actions you took and the skills utilized
R	Relevance	Describe the job-relevance of the skills used
R	Result	Outline the outcomes & benefits

Inappropriate Questions

- In general, within North America, laws prohibit discrimination in employment based on:
 - Disability
 - Marital status
 - Sexual orientation
 - Age
 - Religious affiliation
 - National origin
 - Ethnic background

**There are exceptions
(e.g. government and
international hiring)
so research and
understand the rules
that may apply to
your situation**

Other Common Questions

- What are your ultimate career goals?
- Why are you looking for work outside of teaching? How has your training prepared you for this field?
- What do you think about recent changes in this field or where do you see this field heading?

Options for Handling Inappropriate Questions

- A. Examine the question for intent** and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job.
- B. Answer the question.** You may answer the question as asked, but you may reveal more information than you intended.
- C. Refuse to answer the question:** A strategy is to ask the interviewer how the information he/she is seeking is relevant to the position.

ALWAYS BE TACTFUL:
Often inappropriate questions are
not intended to be offensive.

Prohibited

Permitted

How many sick days did you have last year? Were you hospitalized?

Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job? Can you demonstrate?

Are you planning on starting a family?
What are the ages of your children?

Can you start at 7:30 and work overtime if necessary?

Where is your accent from?

Are you eligible to work in Canada?

Once an offer is extended, there may be the requirement for medical testing or other assessments. If in doubt, inquire tactfully.

Questions For The Interviewer

- **Always prepare** 5-8 questions which specifically demonstrate your familiarity with the school/organization/industry
- **Focus on the future** e.g. training/project opportunities, your role, your supervisor, team philosophy, primary initial duties, work environment, company direction
- **Avoid salary** and benefit questions
- **Be respectful** of the time and **close well...**

The Closing

ALWAYS prepare and deliver a compelling closing statement.

- **Thank the interviewer(s) and (re)state:**
 - your interest
 - your key related strengths
 - your understanding of next steps
 - any key point that you may have overlooked (refer to your notes)
- **Inquire about NEXT STEPS**
- **Obtain contact information...**

Part III – Interview Follow-Up



After The Interview

A **2011** study* of hiring managers showed -
(*collegerecruiter.com)

- **22%** less likely to hire someone who doesn't send a thank-you note
- **86%** believed when a candidate does not follow-up with a thank-you note it showed lack of follow-through
- **56%** state it made them believe that a candidate wasn't serious about the job opportunity



Send a thank-you message within 24 hours of your interview!

If You Haven't Heard a Response...

Within 8-10 days, follow up with a phone call -

- Indicate that you are checking on the **status** of their decision

NOT the successful candidate?

- Thank the employer for their time
- Request feedback on your interview performance
- Ask if you may contact them for future opportunities

Do not burn bridges!

Career Resources

FACT:

Practice increases confidence.

To book an **interview coaching**
or a **practice interview appointment**
with a career consultant call
519.884.0701 ext. 4495

Additional Resources

- [Slide show online](#)
- [Interview Guidebook and resources](#)
- [Social Work Sample Interview Questions](#)
- **Individual Appointments**
 - Practice Interviews or Interview Coaching
 - **Kitchener FSW 104 – Mondays Jan - Mar**
 - **Waterloo Career Centre – Daily year round**
- **Ext 4495 to book**

Connect With Us!

519.884.0710 x4495

careercentre@wlu.ca

wlu.ca/career



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lauriercareercentre.wordpress.com



linkedin.com (Laurier Career Centre group)