

# Interview Success

Faculty of Social Work  
Employment Preparation Series

Career Development Centre  
2015

# Learning Objectives

- **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 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** 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 (i.e. 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?**

# Agenda

- **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're 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 to their environment
2. Compile a comprehensive list of your:
  - Skills – Technical and Interpersonal
  - Experiences
  - Qualifications
3. Be prepared to discuss these in depth

**Ensure that your online image supports your professional image!**

# Research Your Skills

## Technical (hard) 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
- Languages  
(written/verbal)
- Specialized Training  
(CBT, NVC, Anti-Oppression...)

# Research Your Skills

## Interpersonal (soft skills) –

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

- Communication
- Observation/Assessment
- Ability to learn
- Responsibility/Maturity
- Analytical/Logical
- Leadership
- Decision-making
- Tact/Diplomacy
- Negotiation
- Consultation
- Adaptability
- Influence
- Optimism
- Initiative/Innovation
- Problem Solving
- Collaboration
- Interpersonal Competence
- Presentation
- Co-ordination/Planning
- 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”

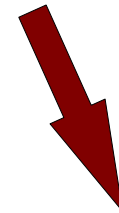
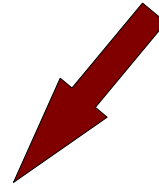
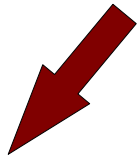


# Know HOW you use Your Skills

## Analytical Skills

Assessment

Planning



Communicate

Document  
Preparation

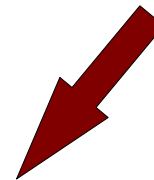
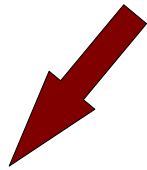
Resource &  
Referrals

# Layer Your Skills

**e.g. Community Engagement**

Evaluation

Research



Community  
Outreach

Workshops/  
Presentations

Identify  
Issues

# Understand the Key Skills Required

- Analytical Skills
- Assessment
- Rapport Building
- Community Programming
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Presentation
- Motivation
- Consultation
- Counselling

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

# Career Awareness

**How much do you know about the career field or industry?**

e.g. Requirements for a program coordinator might include –

- Participant Management
- Teaching/Learning Strategies
- Program Planning, Assessment & Evaluation
- Learning Community/Areas of Specialization

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

# Career Awareness

Be prepared to discuss

- The specific job
  - Identify, assess and understand what the job really involves
- Your observations of your field
  - Requirements
  - Trends
  - Activities
  - Affiliations

Research & Review are Key

# Employer Awareness

## How well do you 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

# Sample Research Resources

- Internet
  - Employer Websites (Press/News Releases)
  - Blogs
  - Twitter
  - LinkedIn
- The regional “Blue Book”
- Chamber of Commerce
- Magazines/Newspapers
- Career Events
- Professional Associations
- Marketline & Scott’s Directories (<http://library.wlu.ca>)
- Similar Organizations (in other cities)
- Public Libraries

**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/qualifications
- Key experiences and achievements
- Knowledge of the company/industry
- Questions to ask the interviewer



Fresh Promotions

**How will you distinguish yourself 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
  - Time, duration, location, parking
- Obtain names & titles of all interviewers
- Verify interview format(s)



# Interview Professionalism

## Attire

- Know the standard of 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
- Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the interview
- Interview starts upon arrival
- Minimize 'day of' distractions



# Interview-Ready Portfolio

- Reference Letters
- Performance Evaluations
- Awards/Certificates
- Work Samples (i.e. programs developed or managed)
- Contact Card
- Copy of Job Description
- Up to date resume
- Cover Letter
- Your interview agenda
- List of questions for the interviewer(s)
- Paper & Pen

# 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 Questions (a.k.a. hypothetical)

Identify and/or discuss the competencies needed in the role

**How would you approach...**

**Describe the core skills required to...**

**Case-Scenarios**

# Most Common Type of Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself

Behaviour-Based Questions



# Common Questions

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

- Identify 3 - 4 Core Competencies
- 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
- 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?

- With the same partner as before
- Switch role from interviewer to interviewee

Interviewers

- Prepare to ask the #2 most frequently asked question...

# What is your weakness?



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[wlu.ca/career](http://wlu.ca/career)

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*Inspiring Lives.*

# Common Questions

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

- **Avoid** a ‘fake’ weakness!
- Identify a weakness that is “**trainable**” not a **character trait**
- If you have an obvious weakness – address it
  - New to 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 simply list theoretical frameworks!
- Focus on **practical** and **applied** knowledge and processes
- Demonstrate how your strengths enable you to address the situation

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

# Approaching Answers

- Draw upon your past experiences
- Be systematic, concise and 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

<b>S</b>	Situation	Briefly describe the setting/situation
<b>T</b>	Task	Indicate what needed to be accomplished
<b>A</b>	Action	Detail the actions you took and the skills used
<b>R</b>	Relevance	Describe the job relevance of the skills used
<b>R</b>	Result	Outline the outcomes and benefits



# Common Questions

## “What are your Salary Expectations?”

- Demonstrate credibility by knowing a realistic and appropriate salary range (LMI, 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?’)

# 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**

# Options for Handling Inappropriate Questions

- Examine the question for intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job
- Answer the question. You may answer the question as asked, but you may reveal more information than you intended
- 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

# Questions For The 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

# 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...



**Translation -  
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 (do not request the decision over the phone)

**If you are NOT the successful candidate -**

- Thank the employer for the opportunity
- Ask if you may contact them again in the future
- Inquire whether you can obtain feedback on your interview so you can learn and grow

**Do not burn bridges!**

# 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  
in the future!**

# Career Resources

## **FACT: Practice increases confidence**

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

# Interview Success Resources

- Book an **interview coaching** or a **practice interview appointment** at x4495
- [Interview Skills Resources online](#)
- Interview Stream The logo for 'INTERVIEW STREAM' features the word 'INTERVIEW' in a grey, sans-serif font and 'STREAM' in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The letters are set against a black background with a white grid pattern.
- Drop-in hours, **Monday through Thursday, 1 – 3 p.m.** for quick questions
- Visit [wlu.ca/career](http://wlu.ca/career) to access:
  - Career Workshops
  - Employment Guidebooks
  - Schedule of Career and Employer Events

# Connect with us!

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**wlu.ca/career**



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linkedin.com (Laurier Career Centre Network)



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