



Sydney University Network for Women

Resumes Job Applications & Interview Skills Workshop

**May 2, 2006
Presented by
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Topic 1

Introduction

Workshop Objectives

Make a positive impression on a selection committee. Learn to address selection criteria, prepare written applications, create a professional résumé and perform at interview. By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Apply knowledge of University recruitment procedures
- Effectively address selection criteria
- Design a high impact resume
- Write an effective cover letter
- Prepare effectively for an interview
- Manage nerves

Workshop Program

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Introducing Your Presenters

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Brenda Smith (Diploma in Human Resources & Grad. Cert. Counselling) is the Recruitment Manager for Unistaff, which is the casual employment service of the University of Sydney. Brenda has over 7 years recruitment experience and is committed to providing high calibre staff to the University.



Topic 2

The University Recruitment Process

It is a rare person who travels through life not having to go through a recruitment process of one sort or another. Most organisations use competitive selection processes in order to select the best person for a position from a pool of candidates.

It is important to your career success that you master the skills of resume writing, cover letters and job applications as these are common ways organisations request information about you in order to determine if you are suitable for their vacant position. The interview is the next crucial step in the recruitment process. Employers use a variety of techniques at interview to assess your suitability for the position. Interviews also give you the opportunity to discuss your interest in and suitability for the job.

Fortunately these skills are straight forward and can be mastered with sufficient knowledge and practice. You've made it this far so now is your opportunity to really demonstrate how you are the best person for the job.

When you find a job vacancy that appeals to you it is important to become familiar with the recruitment process of that organisation. Ask questions about the application process. Make sure you understand all the steps and what documentation is required. You don't want to ruin your chances at that dream job by making a simple clerical error caused by your misunderstanding of the recruitment process.

This is especially true for government positions and other organisations like the University of Sydney who operate merit-based selection processes. These procedures may vary slightly from organisation to organisation so don't assume because you know one merit-based recruitment process that all organisations will have similar procedures. Check the details and ask the contact for clarification.

For information on the recruitment and selection process of the University of Sydney see the relevant policies on the University's intranet at:

General Staff:

http://www.usyd.edu.au/hr/policydev/RandS_GS3apr06.pdf

Academic Staff:

http://www.usyd.edu.au/hr/policydev/Academic_appointments3apr06.pdf

EEO principles and behavioural techniques

Selection panels at the University of Sydney must follow the University's recruitment policies and procedures to ensure appointments are based on merit rather than prior knowledge of the job candidates. Note the following:

- Candidates must follow the application process. DO NOT assume that because the panel knows you that you will be short listed for an interview.
- Each applicant is given equal opportunity to compete for the position.
- Candidates must address the selection criteria in writing in order to progress to the interview stage.
- The successful candidate will be the applicant who best demonstrates how their skills and experience match the skills and experience outlined in the position's selection criteria.

TIPS - Using your recruitment knowledge

So how can your knowledge of the recruitment process help you when applying for a position? Here are some tips for using your knowledge of the process:

- Call the contact person with any queries you have about the position
- Find out who is on the panel and what their particular focus will be
- Submit your application on time and with all relevant documentation
- Ask for feedback if not short-listed or you are unsuccessful after interview
- Supply recent referees and contact in advance to brief them about the job
- Know what can and can't be asked at interview
- Prepare additional materials to take with you to interview to bolster your case
- Ask whether an eligibility list will be an outcome of the process
- Know about the appeals process so you can use it if appropriate

University of Sydney Reclassification Process

When the duties of a position change significantly, either in the kind of work performed or in the level of responsibility required.

Note: Reclassification is not an assessment of the personal merit or attributes of the occupant. Neither a greater volume of the same work nor isolated occurrences of higher duties are justification alone for reclassification.

It is recommended that you contact your HR Manager for advice on reclassification BEFORE submitting an application.

Requests for a reclassification of a position must include an explanatory letter or memorandum from the Head of Department recommending the reclassification and effective date; and an up-to-date Duty Statement signed and dated by Head of Department.

The application must:

- Include the current classification and name of the occupant
- Describe the general function of the position
- Indicate changes to the duties and responsibilities of the position
- Describe the nature of the supervision received and exercised
- Include explanation of any special responsibilities or requirements
- Describe how aspects of the position relate to the classification descriptions of the proposed HEO criteria.

Applications for reclassification for HEO Level 7 to 9 should be forwarded to HR Case Management Group, K06. Applications for reclassification for College staff up to HEO Level 6 at:

- *College of Humanities and Social Sciences* should contact the School Administration Manager
- *College of Health Sciences* should be forwarded to College HR Manager C42
- *College of Sciences and Technology* should be forwarded to the Dean in the first instance and then the College HR Manager F07
- *Corporate Group* should be forwarded to the Corporate HR Manager K06





Topic 3

Writing an effective job application

“What is written without effort is, in general, read without pleasure”
Samual Johnson

Your job application should convey important information about you as a person and about your suitability for the position. It is the first step in the selection process and will determine whether you will obtain an interview. To write the best possible job application you need to thoroughly research the position and organisation so that you can include the most relevant information.

Step 1: Analyse the job advertisement

Read the advertisement and gather the following information. If you can't find it call and ask for it.

- The organisation
- The title of the position and its location within the organisation
- The job classification and salary
- The job description
- The selection criteria or how to obtain the selection documentation

Step 2: Find out more information about the organisation and the position

It's important that you gain as much information as possible about the position and the organisation so that you can focus your application appropriately. Try some of the following suggestions to gain more information on the organisation:

- Get background information from annual reports, business plans by searching the organisations' web site
- Read press articles about the organisation
- Search the internet for references to the organisation

You may need to seek more information by speaking to employers or people doing the job. Questions you might consider asking include:

- What are the duties and responsibilities of this job?
- What qualifications and skills are essential/desirable for this type of work?
- What does a typical day's work involve in this job?
- What prior experience is necessary to perform this job well?
- What are the hours of work?
- What is the salary range/award for the position?
- What do people doing this job (or similar) like about it? What don't they like?
- What personal characteristics are required?

Step 3: Ask the following questions of the contact officer

Again, this information is important in targeting your application appropriately.

- What personal characteristics are required?
- Why is this position vacant?
- What are the key responsibilities of the position?
- What direction is the section taking?
- What are the key obstacles the person on the position will face?
- What expectations do you have of the person in this position?
- With which people or sections would I be working in the position?
- What is the composition of the workforce?
- What is the organisation's approach to professional development?
- What is the culture and general atmosphere of the organization like?
- What are the key priorities of this position during the next 6 months?



Sometimes it can be useful to capture all the information about a position and the organisation on a template known as a Job Analysis Sheet.

Job Analysis Sheet – Example	
Job Title: Administrative Assistant	Reference number: R000123
Organisation: University of Sydney	Date of advertisement: 1/5/04
Location within organisation: Chemistry Dept	Publication: Sydney Morning Herald
Contact details: Ms Mandy Jones	Salary: HEO level 5 (\$41,235 - \$46,205)
Background information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently restructured and this position is new – to support Dean and senior academics Recent press talk about high profile research done by academics in the department 	
Information from contact officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role requires someone who can juggle multiple tasks and who is calm under pressure Key responsibilities are to assistant Dean and senior academics in the department with their administration. Role in updating website and arranging student promotion activities Restructure of the unit aims to promote research excellence and bring in more funding. Key obstacles are settling down of new structure; Expect person in the role to be a self-starter with plenty of initiative, be able to multi-task, liaise well with all levels of staff and students Role reports to the Faculty Manager although direction may come directly from Dean Fast paced environment with friendly staff – sociable atmosphere 	
Selection criteria	Examples from my experience
<i>Ability to work in a customer service team</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holiday waitressing jobs during uni Resolving customer complaints regarding fees assessment at Jones and Block Telephone and reception duties, including dealing with angry and sick patients at Dr's surgery
<i>Initiative and problem solving abilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggesting changes to invoicing procedures which reduced turnaround time by 50% Re-organising roster to fit team commitments
<i>Strong written and verbal communication skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafting annual report and marketing brochure for Jones and Block Publication of essay in 'Admin Art' Public speaking awards in 1999, 2000 Ability to listen to patients who were angry at waiting at Dr's surgery

Job Analysis Sheet	
Job Title:	Reference number:
Organisation:	Date of advertisement:
Job location within organisation:	Publication:
Contact details:	Salary:
Background information:	
Information from contact officer:	
Selection criteria	Examples from my experience

Addressing Selection Criteria

Now that you have all the necessary information you can start writing your application. Don't be put off applying if you don't meet all the criteria. Remember that the selection criteria represent an 'ideal' candidate.

The best job applications are concise and comment on the extent to which the candidate's claims match the selection criteria. Use current, specific examples to demonstrate your skills. The onus is on you to provide EVIDENCE to back up your claims.

Don't assume the panel knows what you are taking about – explain acronyms and the context of particular activities. Provide as much **relevant** information as possible on your previous work experience.

Organise your resume in chronological order and list your most recent training or jobs first. This makes it a lot easier to read.

It is of utmost importance to always check your spelling and grammar. Get someone else to proofread it and provide comments before you send it. An error in your application could result in you not being short-listed!!

The following tips will help you prepare an application that meets the criteria and increase your chances of being selected for interview.



TIPS - Better Job Applications

- Understand what is meant by the different terms used such as –
 - experience in
 - knowledge of
 - ability to
 - demonstrated
 - extensive
 - well developed
- Support your claims with relevant, concrete examples. Avoid unsupported self-aggrandisement and use EVIDENCE to back up your claims
- Use direct, active verbs – see the list on the following page
- Address **all** parts of the selection criteria
- Use dot points rather than text
- Use English well – ensure that despite using bullet points your language is grammatically correct.
- Be results-oriented
- Avoid credibility-reducing words – avoid words alike – always, never, totally, completely etc

Useful words for Job Applications

Action verbs

approved	moderated	persuaded	analysed
implemented	managed	assembled	determined
composed	solved	presented	presided
controlled	created	recruited	governed
initiated	planned	researched	arranged
coordinated	directed	sorted	invented
supervised	revised	developed	designed
trained	investigated	indexed	evaluated
facilitated	negotiated	administered	diagnosed
organised	expanded	distributed	

Skill verbs

observing	servicing	interviewing	risk taking
inventing	analysing	planning	leading
diagnosing	systematising	facilitating	calculating
designing	inspecting	reading	consulting
evaluating	deciding	examining	researching
coordinating	judging	determining	writing
initiating	controlling	imagining	speaking
managing	directing	creating	
figuring	organising	developing	

Problem Action Results = PAR

Use this acronym to help you prove the skills you have in written applications and in interview situations.

P stands for PROBLEM. State the problem you were faced with in a maximum of 1-2 sentences. There may not have been a problem, however, and as a result the P part of the accomplishment is optional.

A stands for Action. Using past tense action verbs, state simply what you did. (Sample verbs include: organised, coordinated, developed, initiated, wrote, created etc...) Ideally, only use one sentence to state the action.

R stands for Results. If possible, quantify the results, ie talk in percentages or numbers of some sort. You're trying to explain what difference it made when you took the action. If you can't quantify the result, use some adjectives to describe it (ie significantly improved, streamlined, facilitated etc)

Example: Can you tell us about your client service experience, in particular dealing with clients with unrealistic expectations?

I've had extensive experience dealing with clients in my role as Reference Librarian at Fisher Library. For over 5 years I have regularly assisted students and other clients with general reference queries and research requests. Some clients have unrealistic expectations and are upset that we cannot undertake literature searches and physically locate the references for them.

For example, a client came to the reference desk about a month ago requesting that I find all the reference material for them for an essay that was due in two weeks time. I explained that I would not be able to leave the reference desk to physically locate the references. They became increasingly agitated but I remained calm, listened to their complaints and clarified their particular issues. I then calmly demonstrated how to use the online catalogue to find the first reference and provided information about where to find the reference. I offered further support if they had difficulty locating the remaining references. I advised them that they could make a formal complaint to the Manager about any other issues. The client was satisfied with this response and successfully used the online catalogue to locate the remaining references on the shelves. They even came back to thank me for my assistance!



Activity: PAR

Use PAR to describe 2-3 skills that you have – try communication, team work or managing priorities.



Topic 4

Creating a high impact resume

A resume is an opportunity to write your own sales material. It's a source of information for potential employers and it's a script for talking about yourself. This is your life and it's up to you how you tell the story.

It's important to put a lot of time and effort into creating your resume as this is the first time an employer gets to form an opinion about you. You want it to be a positive one – first impressions can make all the difference!!

The purpose of a resume (as well as your job application and covering letter) is to get you an interview. Keep in mind that people who will look at your resume are looking for reasons to *reject* your application – they have to obtain a manageable list of candidates to interview.

There is no such thing as a standard resume

Resumes must be rewritten each time you apply for a position to address the specific requirements of that position.

Resume content areas

Generally there are three areas that must be included in a resume - your personal details; a career overview and your career details. Other areas can be included as well. Resumes are very personal documents – design one that suits you. Use the following list to help you with the content areas of your resume:

- Name, address, work, mobile and home telephone numbers.
- Career objective – an action statement saying what you see yourself doing in the future
- Education with dates and qualifications – start with your most recent qualification and then work backwards to high school
- Employment including start and finish dates –start with your most recent work and then go backwards. Describe any career breaks as you would for periods of paid employment
- Work responsibilities
- Achievements/Promotions
- Development activities
- Awards, Accomplishments and Professional Associations
- Other facts – ie: volunteer work
- Referees

The layout of your resume is critical, as you want to entice the employer to read it. Otherwise, it's a wasted opportunity!!



TIPS - Resume Checklist

- Most popular fonts are: Arial, Times New Roman and Courier
- Font size 10 (minimum)
- Headings 12 (minimum)
- Margins of at least 2.5 cm
- Focus on what the employer's needs
- Use plain language – Avoid using jargon or technical language
- Be concise –3 pages maximum.
- No photographs or clip-art
- Use lots of nouns to increase the chances that scanners will pick them up
- Avoid using tables as it's harder to read
- Use high quality paper that is white.
- Do not use both sides of the paper. People may forget to photocopy both sides.
- Staple pages together, number the pages and ensure each page has your name on the top (in the header)
- Make sure it's well laid out, has plenty of 'white space' and is easy to read.
- Make sure there are no typographical errors or spelling mistakes and have someone else read your resume before sending it.
- Use bullets points rather than a narrative style -keep them meaningful
- Keep it honest. Don't exaggerate because if it doesn't stand up to scrutiny you may blow your chances.
- Do not fold your resume – buy an A4 envelope
- Update your referees



Activity: Critiquing resumes

Using the checklist provided, critique the sample resumes you have been given.

Make any notes here about what changes, if any, you will make to your own resume.



Topic 5

Creative cover letters

A covering letter is an additional opportunity to sell yourself to a potential employer. It's often the first thing an employer will read. A poorly written cover letter could mean you're automatically eliminated. Under no circumstances send a standard letter or note. Always personalise the letter by making the effort to find out the name of the person to address the letter to – not Dear Sir! Unless it is stipulated, you do not have to write a covering letter.

TIPS - Covering Letter Checklist

- You must write a new one for each application – eliminates errors
- Position details: position sought, reference number, location and source of the vacancy
- Reasons for applying: Support with qualifications, work experience, work aspirations, interests. Highlight with specific, relevant examples
- Show knowledge of the company
- Include reference to attachments
- Express willingness to support resume at interview. End with a proactive statement like “I look forward to discussing my application in further detail at an interview.”
- Don't repeat what's in your resume. Focus on the experience and competencies in the job advertisement.
- Keep it short – maximum of one page.
- Well laid out and no errors
- A polite request for a reply
- Err on the side of professionalism – don't be flippant. The trick is to be creative without being overconfident.





Topic 6

Successful Interviewing

Purpose of an Interview

The interview gives you and the employer the opportunity to discuss the position and your suitability for it.

For you it is the opportunity to convince the employer that they need your services and to find out more about the job and the company.

For the employer it is the opportunity to assess your abilities and behaviour to determine your suitability for the position. It is also an opportunity for them to find out more about information you provided in your resume and application.

Employers are usually interested in the following:

- your personal presentation
- your career plans
- your ability to communicate
- evidence that you prepared for the interview
- your degree of maturity and desire to take on responsibility
- your ability to solve problems and think logically
- your flexibility

Types of Interviews

There are many different types of interviews and it is important for you, the interviewee, to find out what type of interview you will be experiencing. Types of interviews include:

- Selection Panel interviews
- Informal discussions
- Interviews by one person
- Series of interviews

There are also different formats to interviews such as:

- Telephone interviews
- Videoconference interviews
- Face to Face interviews

You need to prepare well for any interview but for interviews in unusual formats preparation is even more important. You are usually in a situation which inhibits or impairs some part of the communication process and you will need to work hard to make sure this doesn't have a negative impact on your chances of getting the position.

Stages of the Interview

The interview is usually structured with a beginning, middle and end, each stage typically having different types of questions.

Stage 1: The Warm up phase

In this stage the interviewer is trying to create a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere to enable good communication. The questions are predictable and broad and could include questions such as:

- What is it that interests you about this job?
- What skills do you bring to the position?

Stage 2: The Experience phase

In this stage the interviewer is trying to find out if you have the skills and experience to do the job. The questions are usually directly tied to the selection criteria or the duty statement. The types of questions asked during this phase could be behavioural or ask about generic competencies required in the role. They may ask unexpected questions in this stage as well.

Stage 3: The Over to you phase

This is the stage when they ask what you want to know from them. They may ask what questions you have or if there is any additional information you require about the job. This is your opportunity to ask questions of the panel – make use of the opportunity!

Preparing for the Interview

So you've received that call indicating that you've reached the next stage in the selection process and you've been invited to interview for the position. You will now need to prepare for the interview to give you the best chance at securing the position.

The essence to a good interview is preparation

Questions to ask when notified

When you are invited to attend an interview for a position, make the most of this opportunity to obtain information about the interview panel, the interview format and location. Ask questions that will provide you with information about:

- **When** the interview is being held (time, date etc)
- **Where** the interview is being held (building location, room location within the building, vicinity to public transport/parking etc)
- **Who** will be conducting the interview (a panel versus just one person; their positions within the company etc)
- **How** the interview will be conducted (format – question and answer, informal discussion, psychological testing, assessment centre etc)
- **Where** you are in the interview order of the day. If you're last you'll need to be memorable – if you're first they will be warming up on you.

Research the company

Find out about the structure of the organisation, its range of activities, products and services, its clients and main offices, growth areas, major policies etc. Rule of thumb – the higher the position the more you should know about the company and the industry. Consider some of the following:

- What are the company's current goals?
- What issues are they facing?
- What are their plans for the future?

Visit the workplace

This provides you with information about the working environment and, if the interviews are being held on site, the information you need to ensure you get there on time. Plan your journey - don't leave it to the last minute.

Know your capabilities

Be clear about your career plans, your strengths and areas where you need support or development.

Brief your referees

Ensure that you have briefed referees prior to the interview. Referees hate being called without notice and it can reflect badly on you in their responses!

Before the Interview

You need to look comfortable and like you will fit the role on offer. Polish your shoes. Dress on the conservative side and to the most formal level you would expect to encounter in the position. It can help to check out the company 'uniform' before the interview and dress to match. Remember that neatness and cleanliness communicate a strong positive non-verbal message.

What to take

It's rare that you turn up to an interview empty handed so you might want to spend some time before the interview preparing your 'Interview Folder'. It should look neat and professional and contain the following:

- Copies of your resume and job application
- Copies of written references, commendations and certificates (if relevant)
- Examples of your work (proposals, reports, plans etc)
- A list of your referees and their contact details
- Reminders of your skills and goals
- A pen and note paper
- Names and contact details
- The names of the people interviewing you, directions to the interview location
- A comb, tissues, breath mints

Remember to arrive a few minutes early!

During The Interview

Creating a good impression

While your focus should be on proving that you are the best person for the job given your skills, experience and personal qualities don't underestimate how important it is to create a good impression from the outset.

- Be punctual
- Shake hands. Greet everyone.
- Start the conversation on an unrelated topic – something you noticed on the way there. You come across as warm and friendly and this helps to relax the interviewer!
- Be enthusiastic, positive and confident. Put zest into your answers.
- Show that you have a sense of humour
- Make it easy for them
- Avoid patronising the panel and understand the status of the panel members.

Body language

Be aware of your body language and the non-verbal messages that you are giving. The interview panel will be using this information in their appraisal of you.

- Maintain a relaxed upright posture. Sit comfortably and lean slightly forward.
- Don't fidget – place hands in lap
- Slow down your responses
- Try not to create a barrier between you and the interviewer(s)
- Maintain natural eye contact. Look at who's talking. When you are talking, move your glance from one interviewer to another.
- Nod and say mmm to show you are listening
- Keep the tone of your voice well modulated and pleasant to listen to.

Have the main points you want to get across ready so you can refer to them if your mind goes blank.

If you get a blotchy red neck when you are nervous wear a high neck shirt or sweater

If you get an upset stomach due to nerves, make sure you get there early enough to visit the toilet so you can give yourself a chance to get comfortable.

Interview questions

Preparing for interview questions

The best preparation you can do for an interview is to prepare for questions that you think are likely to be asked of you. Use the selection criteria as a guide to the areas that might be covered and then brainstorm other areas that may be covered given your understanding of the role and the organisation. There are no set formulas for interview questions, although some of the typical areas covered include:

- Reasons for applying
- Qualifications
- Your understanding of what the job will involve
- What experience you have that relates to the job
- What you can contribute to the job
- Knowledge of the department and the job
- Any special background experience
- How you see yourself carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the job
- How you would deal with typical problems that might occur in the job
- Additional final comments you might like to make

Consider using the PAR structure to help you answer questions logically and completely.

Prepare answers to the generic competencies.

Prepare answers to show how your skills and experience will benefit the employer.

- How would your colleagues describe your team skills?
- How would your leaders describe your capabilities and skills?
- How do you go about setting tasks for other people?

Prepare specific examples.

Prepare a short summary statement highlighting your strengths. Use your job diary to list specific examples of skills you have that are particularly relevant to the position.

Prepare for behavioural questions.

Behavioural questions ask what you would do in a given situation. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. They are designed to find out more about how you would behave in a particular situation. It is important to try to structure your responses to these questions well so state:

- what you see as important to consider in the situation,
- what steps you would take and why; and
- provide an example of how you have done something similar in the past (with results) if possible

Prepare for general questions about yourself

Remember that the main aim of the interview is to find out more about you and how well you will be able to do the job. They are going to want to know more about you so expect questions about yourself. You should prepare answers for questions like the following:

- What has attracted you to this role?
- What can you offer the role?
- Why would the employer employ you?
- How do your skills match the employer's requirements?
- In your last job what accomplishments gave you the most satisfaction?
- What are your career plans?

If you are asked about weaknesses think of innocuous ones. Make your weakness relevant but not integral to the role. State how you are addressing your weakness. Provide specific examples of how you learn quickly if you do not have a particular skill.

You should **not** be asked about your spouse, your spouse's employment or salary, about your children, any dependents or child care arrangements, marital status, credit status, sexuality, racial or ethnic origin; religion or political party affiliations. If you are, ask how the question relates to the criteria for the job or politely decline to answer.

Prepare for unexpected questions

These types of questions are designed to see how you cope with the unexpected. It is difficult to prepare for these given their nature but try to brainstorm some questions and responses with colleagues, friends and family. The better prepared you are the fewer unexpected questions you will get!

Prepare questions you want to ask

It is important that you turn the interview into a two way communication process so that you are able to find out if you want the job! Your opportunity to ask questions usually comes at the end stages of the interview. Make the most of this opportunity to end the interview on a positive note.

It is important to ask relevant, well thought out questions – it shows you've done your research and can impress interviewers. Try not to ask too many questions or to ask questions that put the panel on the spot – they may not like that. Consider asking questions on one or more of the following areas:

- Job prospects
- Conditions of service (leave, salary, superannuation) – although try to leave this until right at the end of the interview and if possible only after they have offered you the job.
- Measurements of performance in the job
- Resources available to help achieve the objectives of the position
- Special projects associated with the position
- Typical problems encountered in carrying out the job

- Decision making authority associated with the position
- When a decision will be made about the successful applicant
- What would be my initial duties and responsibilities?
- What kinds of training programs does the company provide?
- Where will the company be in 5 years?
- What advancement opportunities are there for a person with my background and experience?

Answering questions in interviews

This is, of course, the main way that interviewers will obtain information from you about your past, so that they can make a judgement about how suitable you are for their vacant position.

Remember
there are no right answers in an interview situation

Consider the following tips when answering interview questions:

- Find out how long you've got so that you can keep your eye on the time and get your main points across.
- Be honest. Avoid stretching the truth about your work.
- Treat them as though you don't know them and they don't know you. This is particularly important if you know your interviewers. They CANNOT use the information they know about you to make their decision unless you mention it in the interview.
- Avoid saying anything that does not put you in a positive light
- Take time before answering – don't be afraid to pause. It's better to take a moment than to waffle.
- Don't take a question on face value – think about what's behind the question. Take note of subtle hints.
- Listen carefully. Ask for clarification on unclear questions.
- Use examples to illustrate your skills and experience. Provide enough information so that the interviewers have something to base their decision on but not too much information that you drift into waffle and stray from the point.
- Use fluent English expression

Dealing with nerves

Nerves are to be expected in the interview situation and they can be a good source of adrenalin to enhance your performance. Expect that you will be nervous but learn some techniques to help you manage your nerves before and during the interview.

The 3 Step Rehearsal

One of the best ways to deal with nerves is to practice. This is a 3 step process that will help you become comfortable with the interview situation.

1. **Mentally rehearse** your responses to interview questions based on the notes you have compiled. Mentally rehearse introductory statements, the issues you want to raise followed by conclusion statements for questions you expect will be asked. Don't commit your responses to memory – they will sound fake. Just practice in your mind the structure and content of your answers.
2. **Rehearse your responses out loud**, in front of the mirror. Your friends and family may think you're a bit odd but you need to hear how your voice sounds.
3. **Get a friend or family member to interview you** and rate your performance using a checklist. Brief them and provide them with questions you think may be asked. Remember, it is better to practice in this supportive environment and learn how to manage your nerves and embarrassment than to do it in the real situation. Work together to analyse your performance and identify weak spots you can work on improving.

If you don't can't find a friend or family member with enough time to spare to help you use a tape recorder or a Dictaphone. Keep in mind you won't get feedback on your body language but you can still analyse your performance on content and voice.

Managing stress in the interview

Interviews are a stressful situation so expect to be nervous, anxious and/or stressed. Aim to find some techniques that help you to manage your stress and anxiety levels so that they don't negatively impact on your performance. You may need to try a few different techniques before you find some that work for you. Consider having a few that work for you in different situations. Here are two to start with:

- **Breathing techniques** – Close your eyes and take a long, deep and slow breath in through your nose. Exhale slowly through your nose. Repeat this for 5-10 minutes while consciously softening the muscles in your body, particularly the muscles in your neck, forehead and back.
- **Positive visualisation** – Do what the sports stars do by visualising yourself commencing the interview with confidence, answering questions competently and completely using examples, and then finishing off the interview strongly and positively. Reinforce the positive aspects of your performance. Do not keep telling yourself you are hopeless at interviews – it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Post-interview Self Evaluation

You may not feel like it but it is essential for you to do a post-interview review so that you can identify areas for improvement. You need to learn from your mistakes. Ideally you should do your review straight after the interview so you don't forget what was discussed. Your review should cover the following areas:

- **Preparation** – Did you do enough?
- **Presentation** – Were you relaxed? Did you manage to avoid having memory blocks? Did you articulate your motivations well?
- **Body language** – Did you remember to smile?
- **Topics** – Which anticipated topics came up for discussion? Did you introduce any topics yourself?
- **Questions** – What questions did you find particularly difficult? What questions will I answer differently next time? How will my responses differ?
- **Overall impression** - What impression do you think you made? What will I do differently on the next occasion in order to increase my chances of success?

Getting feedback

It sounds scary but it is important to get feedback from the interviewers so that you can find out where to improve next time. This needs to be approached sensitively both from your point of view and the interviewers.

- Don't put the interviewer on the spot creating a situation where they have to justify why you weren't employed.
- Stress that while you are disappointed you want to ensure you don't make the same mistake next time.
- Try not to counter explanations – listen politely and thank the interviewer for the opportunity to present your case and helping you assess your interview performance.



 **TIPS** - Interview Self-Evaluation Checklist

- Write a list of what went well
- Consider the impression I created - did I :
 - Arrive on time
 - Shake hands and greet all the panel members
 - Behave in a warm and friendly manner
 - dress appropriately
- Consider the responses I gave – did I
 - Speak in a pleasant tone and modulate my voice
 - Speak positively and enthusiastically
 - Take time to answer
 - Provide structured responses
 - Use examples
 - Ask questions
- Consider my body language – did I
 - Exhibit appropriate body language
 - Deal with nerves
 - Sit leaning slightly forward
 - Restrain from fidgeting
 - Maintain natural eye contact
- Did I demonstrated active listening (nodding etc)
- Did I acknowledged all interviewers
- Write a list of things I could have done better
- Create an action plan to improve in these areas





Activity: Action Planning

Using the information you've learned today create an action plan for yourself. List

- the areas you want to make some changes
- what the desired change will be like – ie your outcome
- what steps you need to take to create that outcome
- what resources you'll need to take those steps
- the timeframe for completing each step
- the date you will start!



Topic 8

References and Recommended Reading

Books

L.G. Boldt (1999) **Zen and the art of making a living: A practical guide to creative career design.** Compass, USA

R.N. Bolles (1996) The 1996 **What Color is your parachute? A practical manual for job-hunters and career-changers.** Ten Speed Press, Berkley.

G. Morgan and A. Banks (1999) **Getting that Job: How to establish and manage your career into the next millennium.** Harper Collins.

D. Villiers (2000) **How to Address Selection Criteria: Improving your chances of being short-listed for a job.** DM Press.

L. Willis and J. Daisley (1993) **Springboard Women's Development Workbook.** Hawthorn Press

M.J. Yate (2001) **Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions.** 5th Edition. Korgan Page, London.

J. Bright and J. Earl (2000) **Resumes that get shortlisted: Proven strategies to get the job you want.** Business and Publishing.

Websites

SUN Mentoring Website: http://www.usyd.edu.au/sun/html/mentor_home.htm

PM&D Website: <http://intranet.usyd.edu.au/pmd/>

Staff Development Unit website: <http://www.ssdu.usyd.edu.au/>

The career planning website - My Future : www.myfuture.com.au

Tips on resumes, applications and interviews: www.seek.com.au

More tips on resumes, applications and interviews: www.mycareer.com.au

Career search: <http://jobsearch.gov.au/careersearch.aspx?WHCode=2&TextOnly=0>

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