Effective job interviews

Stephen Fischer,
Career Counselor
EPFL Career Center
What purpose do interviews serve?

- Recruiters look for answers to the following:
  1. Can you do the job?
  2. Do you really want to do the job?
  3. Do you have the potential to do more?
  4. Are you a better match than other candidates?

- To get useful answers, they will focus on:
  - Your technical and soft skills;
  - Your academic and professional experience;
  - Your character vis-à-vis your personality.
Why have several interviews?

- **With a recruitment specialist (ext. or int.)**
  → To check the candidate’s generic skills, consistency of career path, expectations and ability to adapt to the company’s culture.

- **With future supervisor and/or colleague**
  → To check technical skills, ability to face specific, job-related expectations, to blend in with the team and to be managed.

- **With another manager or department head**
  → Follow-up interview used to confirm the first impressions, in particular with regard to the applicant’s ability to integrate.

- **With a higher-ranking manager**
  → Used to validate the final selection (there are usually only one or two candidates left at that point).
Tech talk is easy...

- Ironically, the toughest part for most of you is that you usually see a generalist first, not another “techie.”
- You need to prepare for questions that may seem irrelevant or even too personal.
- Practice explaining complex ideas in simple, clear terms.
- When in doubt, ask him/her to rephrase the question.
The 8 most looked-for competencies:

- Ability to analyze
- Ability to develop solutions
- Sense of responsibility
- Maturity
  For recent graduates, this translates into "business awareness"
- Motivation
- Positive and collaborative attitude
- Adaptability
- Good interpersonal skills

*During the first interview, most questions will aim at eliciting such qualities. Feel free to reassure the recruiter that you have them before he asks!*
HR believes that past performance can predict future behavior...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.</td>
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‘STAR’ Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions
Typical interview questions

- **Tell me about yourself** (*alt.* “Sum up your CV for me” = Elevator Speech)
- What did you do in your last job (your Master/PhD thesis)?
- Why our company? Why this job (program)?
- Name three of our competitors, and compare and contrast us to them.
- What is your understanding of the role of an R&D engineer (or...)?
- What specific skills do you have for the job and how would you contribute?
- What are your career goals, and where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
- Tell me about a problem you faced during your studies, and how you solved it.
- How do you organize your work?
- What do your classmates think of you?
- Would you rather work alone or in a team?
- Tell me about a situation where you did more than what was expected of you.
- What are you especially proud of? What was your biggest disappointment so far?
- What are your three main strengths / weaknesses?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Do you have any questions for me?
Preparation, preparation, preparation

- Practice answering the typical questions
- Give special attention to your **elevator pitch** as it usually comes at the beginning
- Research the company and its competitors
- Don't forget the logistics:
  - Dress and grooming count: better too formal than not enough!
  - Arrive 10 minutes early; manage any extra bags or coats.
  - Greet the person(s) receiving you (eye contact, handshake)...
  - Always have an up-to-date, more detailed version of your CV.
  - Bring supporting documents, but use them with caution.
  - Have key points prepared & take notes during interview.
  - Like every good salesman, have business cards with you!
Definite “no-no’s” & “best-to’s”

☐ Do:
- Greet all people you meet upon arrival
- Double-check your appearance
- Make eye contact and shake hands as you enter
- Remember to smile, and to breathe!

☐ Don’t:
- Show up late (but if unavoidable, call ASAP)
- Assume they will have your docs printed & ready
- Be arrogant or pushy (manner and language)
- Fidget, stretch, yawn or fold your arms...
Prepare (and take) notes

Fold an A4 page down the middle:

- On one side: note all key points
  - Your “Elevator Pitch” in a phrase or two
  - Three strengths, three weaknesses
  - Your role in a project that succeeded
  - Your role in one which failed (and what you learned)
  - At least three relevant questions for the recruiter
  - Don’t forget to ask about next steps...

- On the other side:
  take notes during the interview
After the interview

- “It’s never your last interview,” so analyze what went well, and what to improve for next time.

- Send a short note sent within 24 hours but avoid platitudes:
  
  - **Say “Thanks!”**
    - “I would like to thank you for receiving me at your lab and spending so much of your valuable time with me.”
  
  - **Restate your interest - in a substantiated way**
    - “Our meeting confirmed that a key requirement for the position is the ability to reach out to as many prospects as possible, which is all the more motivating for me as it was the main reason for my application.”
    - “The fact that you use method XYZ to measure ABC confirms that you are at the forefront of your field. It would be a real pleasure to join your company.”

*It is normal to call after 10 days, if they haven’t contacted you.*
Participate in career events

Bookmark: http://carriere.epfl.ch

To sign up for workshops, roundtables, individual counseling or Mock Interviews, please use our online request form.

Contact us: cc@epfl.ch