

INTERVIEWING FOR PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICA AND INTERNSHIPS



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Attitude is Everything

The key element to successful interviewing is not your experience, your grades, the classes you took, or any of your other credentials. Those are what helped you obtain an interview. The key element to successful interviewing can be summed up in one word: **ATTITUDE**. If you want to rise above others who may have more experience or better grades, you will need to use your attitude to sell yourself.

Your attitude determines whether you will "make the cut" or be discarded. Recruiters often remember that attitude when the dust has settled after interviewing 10, 20, or even 100 candidates. Your goal is to leave them with the impression that your desire is to do your very best for the organization and that you are focused on the organization's needs.

You can show your winning attitude in the way you present yourself. Incorporate the actual words "positive attitude," "excellence," and "striving to be my best" into your interview language. Then show them how this mindset has positively affected your life. Show them when, where and how you have put forth extra effort above and beyond the call of duty. Show them how you beat a deadline, how you excelled in a project, or how you made a difference by going the extra mile.

Preparing for an Interview

Preparation is the single most important thing you can do to ensure a successful interview. People who spend time preparing have a much easier time talking about their skills and how they would benefit the organization. Additionally, their answers generally have more depth and show greater thoughtfulness. In short, being prepared really pays off!

Research the Organization

Researching an organization allows you to understand what the organization is all about and how your talents will benefit the employer. Here are some basic questions you should find answers to:

- What services and products does the organization offer?
- What is the organization's mission?
- What does the organization value in its employees?
- What is the organization's financial status?
- Who are the organization's main competitors?
- What trends are taking place in the field you are exploring?
- What skills does the position require?
- What goals does the employer have for the person in the position?

To get answers to these and other questions:

- Look at the organization's web page.
- Search the internet for related information.
- Explore the library.
- Look in professional journals.
- Read newspapers and magazine articles.
- Utilize professional organizations and their publications.
- Contact your chamber of commerce.
- Ask Career Services for help.

HOT Tip – When using the web, use several different search engines to find related information. Also, when looking at an organization’s web page make sure to read their mission statement.

Self Knowledge

Self knowledge is crucial to interviewing well. You must be able to articulate your goals, talents, skills, experiences and accomplishments. Developing an effective resume and cover letter will go a long way to helping you define what you can bring to the table. You should be able to answer the following questions:

- What are my long term and short term career goals?
- What do I want out of this position?
- What attracts me to the job and organization?
- How do my talents and skills fit the job?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What are my accomplishments?

Anticipate Questions and Think Through Your Answers

Anticipating questions allows you to ponder your responses in advance and provide well thought out answers. Most interviews will cover some standard questions. For example, you can bet that sometime in the interview you will be asked: “Why do you want this job?” Answering that question will be easier if you have given it some thought beforehand.

Anticipating standard questions is easy, but what can really set you apart is anticipating questions that are not general to all jobs. The key here is to ask yourself, “What is the employer looking for, and what questions will they ask in order to determine if I meet their requirements?”

Behavioral Interviewing

Today, many interviewers are trained to conduct Behavior Based Interviews. Behavioral interviewing is a method aimed at gathering information from job candidates about past behaviors and performance. The premise is that the best predictors of future performances are specific examples of past performance. In other words, employers do not want to hear you say you have certain skills, they want you to provide specific examples that **SHOW** you have those skills. Examples of behavioral based questions include:

1. Can you describe a time when you had a conflict with a coworker and how you handled it?
2. Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond your job duties to provide excellent customer service. What was the result?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you tried to motivate someone to do something they were not interested in doing?

Behavioral interviewers are seeking the STAR response:

1. Describe the **Situation** or **Task** – explain the context of the situation.
2. Describe the **Action** that you took – walk the interviewer through the steps that you took to handle the issue.
3. Explain the **Results** – describe the results of your action. If the results were unintended or negative, discuss what you learned from the situation.

4. In an effort to prepare for a behavioral interview, consider these steps:
 1. Be very familiar with your resume.
 2. Consider important accomplishments and learning experiences that you may discuss when interviewing.
 3. Think about the competencies required for the position and try to target your answers to those competencies.

Make a List of Things You Want the Interviewer to Know about You

Bring to the interview a list of things you want the interviewer to know about you. Each of us has special talents that we feel we can bring to an organization. Your interviewer's questions may not prompt you to relate some of your most valuable skills. Your list can help you remember to include them in your answers when appropriate.

Develop Your Own Questions

Part of an interview's purpose is to allow candidates the chance to gain enough information about the job and organization to determine if the position will be a good fit for them. Since you would be spending a significant amount of time engaged in the job, you need to know as much as possible about the position. Therefore, it makes sense that you should have questions for the employer.

Many employers assume that if you do not have any questions about the job, either you do not know enough about the position to ask questions or you just do not care about the job at all. In many cases, neither of these two assumptions is true. Most often, the interviewee can not recall their questions at the time of the interview. To prevent this situation, it's best to write down your questions in advance. Some questions you could ask include:

- What is a typical day like?
- How will you evaluate the performance of the person in this position?
- What qualities are you seeking in an ideal candidate?
- What are the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of this position?
- How would you determine whether or not the person in this position is successful?
- What short and long range plans do you have for the position and department?
- How would you describe your organization's culture?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?

Practice, Practice, Practice

Ask friends or family members to help you with mock interviews. Mock interviews give you the opportunity to practice articulating your talents. They help you recognize bad habits and distracting mannerisms such as "run on answers" and staring at the floor. Finally, practice allows you to get you used to interviewing and gives you more confidence when talking to a potential employer. Mock interviews may also be available through Career Services.

Dressing for an Interview

Before you introduce yourself, before you shake someone's hand, and before you answer any questions, your appearance is going to give the interviewer an impression of you. It is up to you

whether or not that impression is going to be a positive one or a negative one. Do not make the mistake of under dressing. It's much better to be over dressed and show that you are taking the job seriously rather than be under dressed and display a sense of indifference.

Here are some basic tips on dress etiquette for interviews:

Men and Women

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark blue or gray is best)
- Conservative shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets--no tinkling coins
- No gum, candy or cigarettes
- Light briefcase or portfolio case
- No visible body piercing (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

The Day of the Interview

Get a Good Night's Rest and Eat Well

This may seem like common sense but it is important. No one can put their best foot forward if they are exhausted and have an upset stomach. Interviewing takes concentration and thought.

Arrive Early

Give yourself extra time to reach your appointment and arrive early, but not too early. Try to make it to your appointment 10-15 minutes early. Arriving too early or late looks unprofessional. Make sure to anticipate the traffic and get good directions before the interview.

During the Interview

Pay Attention to Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is often the most overlooked and the most important aspect of interviewing. Be aware of these different forms of nonverbal communication:

- ***Eye Contact*** – It is important to look the interviewer in the eye. If you do not maintain appropriate eye contact, the interviewer may think that you are not confident or, worse, that you are lying.
- ***Facial Expressions*** – Many interviewees are often unaware of the expressions that they make during interviews. If you tend to be a very facially expressive person, conducting a mock interview and getting feedback on your expressions may be helpful.
- ***Posture*** – Posture signifies your level of confidence and comfort in an interview. Sit or stand up straight. Do not slouch in the chair, even if that seems more comfortable. Poor posture could indicate lack of confidence and/or disinterest. Sitting up straight and towards the edge of your seat will show that you're engaged, confident and interested.

- **Gestures** – Gesturing can sometimes be very distracting during an interview. If you tend to use your hands too much when you talk, be aware of that during the interview. You want the interviewer to pay attention to what you’re *saying*, not what you’re *doing*.
- **Space** – Be aware of not invading the personal space of those you meet during the interview.

Keep on Track

Keep your answers short and to the point unless you are asked to elaborate. It is good to give detailed answers, but if you ramble on for long periods of time, you risk losing the attention of your audience.

Answer the Questions

One of the biggest complaints of interviewers is that candidates do not answer their questions. Instead, they talk around them or give unrelated examples. Make sure you listen to questions carefully and answer the questions asked. If you are unsure what the interviewer is asking, it’s ok to ask them to clarify.

Be Energetic

Remember, the employer is looking to see if you are excited about the position. Being energetic shows that you are enthusiastic about the position, and that you will work hard.

Give Examples and Relate Accomplishments

Providing examples and explaining accomplishments provides evidence of your skills and can set you apart from other candidates. Examples make you more memorable and demonstrate past behavior. When giving examples, use the STAR response outlined earlier in this document.

When relating accomplishments

- Tell exactly what you were able to do.
- Explain how well you were able to do it.
- Describe the impact your activities had for the organization.

Be Professional

Being professional means being polite, courteous, and tactful. More than that, it means being prepared and presenting yourself in a way that conveys competence and interest in the position.

Interviewing Questions for Psychology Practica and Internships

We have compiled a list of frequently asked questions in a training related interview situation based on feedback we have received from students over the past several years. It is likely that you may have some of these questions asked of you during an interview, and we suggest you review them as a part of your preparation when you go to a site for an interview.

- What is your theory of change?
- What is your theory of psychopathology?

- What is your theoretical orientation?
- How do you consider diversity in your work?
- What has been your most difficult/challenging case?
- What has been your most successful case?
- What theorist do you admire most?
- What is/are your greatest strength/s?
- What is/are your greatest weakness/es?
- Why do you want to be a psychologist?
- What can you bring to this site?
- What are your research interests?
- What are your professional goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What are some of the most interesting readings about the field you've come across?
- What are your main interests in the field?
- What population/diagnosis is the most difficult for you?
- What words describe you?
- What personal attributes do you bring to the therapeutic relationship?
- What would your colleagues say about you?
- What have you enjoyed the most about your previous sites?
- What have you enjoyed the least about your previous sites?
- What do you look for in supervision?
- Describe one of your best supervisory experiences.
- What is the profile of your current caseload?
- Why do you want to come to this site?

Questions you might consider asking during the site interview:

- What are the qualities you are looking for in an intern?
- How do you structure your supervision with interns?
- How are supervisors assigned to students?
- What is the culture like here?
- How would you describe the relationship between interns and staff members?
- What are the best and most challenging aspects of this internship?
- Are there any days that students are required to be on site for supervision, staffing or other responsibilities?
- Is there office space available for student use on an on-going basis?
- Are there computers available for student use (usually for diagnostic report writing, progress notes or therapy summaries)?
- How does your program encourage diversity?
- What are some of the challenges that your organization faces?
- Are there any current research opportunities in which I may be able to get involved?
- Are there any special training opportunities that I might be able to take advantage of?
- Can you give me an example of where your past interns are placed professionally?
- When will you be notifying students of your decision?

Questions to ask current interns at internship sites:

1. What do you like and dislike about this site?
2. How many hours would you typically work in a week?
3. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this site?
4. How does the site work with you in regards to balancing work life and family life?

5. If you could give me a list of characteristics about the site, what would that list include?
6. What has been the most challenging aspect of your training?
7. How was your relationship with your supervisor and supervision in general?
8. What are your true feelings about the site?
9. How strongly would you recommend or not recommend this site and why?
10. Is there anything you would like to tell me that I should know regarding this site that you wish you would have known prior to working here?

Source: The Complete Chronological Workbook for Obtaining a Psychology Internship by David Tharp

Interview Follow-Up

Personal Critique – How did the interview go? Ask Yourself...

1. Did I present my qualifications well?
2. Did I inspire confidence in my abilities?
3. Was I tense?
4. Was I too aggressive? Not aggressive enough?
5. Did I talk too much? Too little?
6. Did I pass up clues, which gave me openings to “link” my background to the site?
7. What points did I make that seemed to interest the interviewer?
8. Did I interview the site as well as permit them to interview me?
9. Did I exhibit sincere interest in the prospective site and have some knowledge of the company?
10. Did I criticize a former employer?
11. Did I find it hard to say what I wanted to say?
12. What would I do differently?

Record Keeping:

It is recommended to keep adequate records of your training applications including:

1. Curriculum vitas or letters mailed (date, name of site, person to whom directed)
2. Date and nature of response
3. Interview (if any) and person seen (date)
4. Result of interview

Thank You Letter Guidelines

- Send thank you letters to the following people: individuals with whom you interviewed for employment or internships, individuals who referred you to an organization, individuals who offered you employment, individuals who rejected you for a position, individuals with whom you had an informational interview and individuals who wrote recommendations for you.
- Before you leave an organization, ensure that you have obtained a business card or taken careful measures to write down the exact name and title of each person with whom you had contact.
- If at all possible, send your thank you letter within 24 hours of an interview.

- A thank you letter should be brief and limited to only one page.
- Personalize each letter and send one to each person with whom you interviewed at an organization. Each letter does not need to be completely different but should refer to some unique aspect of the conversation you had with that particular individual. Your letters will likely be kept in a human resources file and thus should not be identical.
- Your letter should thank the employer for his or her time and emphasize your enthusiasm and interest in the position for which you interviewed.
- If possible, refer to some aspect that will make you stand out amongst other candidates. For instance, reference a particular topic of conversation that came up during your interview such as a common interest regarding a particular area of research; give further explanation regarding a skill for which the employer may have been concerned that you lacked; or reiterate a particular strength or skill that interested the interviewer.
- Thank you letters are an excellent opportunity to highlight qualifications, skills and abilities that you forgot or were unable to mention during the interview.
- Carefully proofread each letter and allow another individual to read each one as well.

Some Common Interview Questions

- Why do you want this job?
- What skills can you bring to the position?
- Tell me about yourself?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What motivates you?
- How has your education prepared you for this position?
- What courses did you like best and why?
- In what ways do you think you can contribute to the organization?
- Tell me/us about a time when you faced a significant challenge? How did you address the situation and what happened.
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What type of environments are you most comfortable in?
- Under what conditions do you work best?
- Give me /us an example of an accomplishment you are especially proud of.
- What role do you usually play on a team?
- What are your professional goals?
- Describe a time when you showed initiative.
- Tell me/us about a conflict you experienced with a coworker or supervisor and how you handled the situation.
- What are your salary requirements?