



*The Interview  
Handbook*

ACS CAREER  
SERVICES

# The Interview Handbook



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*The American Chemical Society Department of Career Services (DCS) offers career assistance and information on employment issues to chemistry professionals. This booklet was written for the chemist at any career stage. The advice is based on observations of employment interviews and this edition was updated by Edward Kostiner, ACS Career Consultant. Frank Walworth, Manager of the DCS Office of Professional Services, reviewed the manuscript for completeness and accuracy. Previous editions of the booklet (published 1994 and 1996) were written by DCS staff members. The department is grateful to the current and former writers and reviewers for their time and effort to develop this guide.*

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# PREFACE

You probably already know that your résumé is a tool to obtain an interview with a potential employer, but the interview determines whether you will receive an offer of employment. Many job candidates mistakenly believe that their work ends once they have secured an interview, and those who are unprepared for an interview are rarely successful. Few candidates invest the time and energy necessary to prepare; that lack of preparation can have an extremely negative effect on the outcome of the interview.

An interview gives the candidate and the interviewer an opportunity to exchange information about the open position. Your goal as a candidate is to present yourself in the best possible light, so that you stand out as the ideal candidate for the position. To accomplish this goal, you must seriously prepare for every interview, realizing that your level of preparation most probably will be the deciding factor in whether you receive a job offer. What you know about a company will help you demonstrate that you have the skills, abilities, and experience that the interviewer is seeking.

You can refine your interview skills to positively affect the outcome of your interviews. To begin, you must understand what the interview process entails. Think of the interview process as a series of steps:

- determining your values and needs,
- learning about the company,
- planning and preparing for the logistics of the interview,
- going through the meeting itself,
- determining reasonable compensation,
- negotiating an offer, and
- maintaining your marketability after you get the job.

You will learn about each part of this process, different kinds of interviews, and how to prepare yourself for and ace an interview.



# Preparing for an Interview

ONE

As a candidate, your goal is to present yourself in the best possible light to a potential employer. With some advance preparation, you can reach this goal. Begin with yourself: Identify the skills and accomplishments that you can offer an employer.

## *Get To Know Yourself*

In any job market, many well-qualified candidates compete for a single position. Clearly identifying what you have to offer will give you confidence and help you write your résumé, match your qualifications to the needs of the market, and respond to interview questions such as “What can you do for us?”

This exercise is not something to be done off-the-cuff. Take the time to think about what you have done in your personal life, at work, and—if you’re a new graduate—at school. Jot down everything that you can think of; remember, even basic skills and modest accomplishments are worthy of note!

When you think you have listed all your skills and accomplishments, think about which of those skills (computer skills, communication skills, leadership skills, or technical skills, for example) have led to each accomplishment. Assign each accomplishment to one or more skill categories. Here’s an example excerpt:

### Project Management Skills

- Supervised staff of 10 employees in review, evaluation, and validation of analytical data.
- Designed efficient databases for organic and inorganic analytical test results.

### Analysis/R&D Skills

- Prepared and analyzed volatile and semivolatile compounds using GC/MS.
- Developed an efficient synthesis (85% overall yield) of sucrose derivatives.

Modify the list until you feel that it best reflects your experience. When you are finished, you will have a list of your skills, backed up by concrete examples (your accomplishments), to help you compose your résumé, write cover letters, and prepare for interviews.



When you identify your skills and accomplishments, only the results count. It is not enough to say what you did; you have to go one step farther and show the outcome of those actions. Be as specific and quantitative as possible in identifying your accomplishments, because vague statements will not hold up to scrutiny.

## *Identify Your Values*

Why should you think about your personal values when contemplating a professional position? Because most of your waking hours are spent at work. It is very important to have your values satisfied in the workplace. When they are not met—or worse, are not respected—you may find yourself a very unhappy employee.

Help to ensure a good employee–employer match by listing your values in your résumé and cover letter, using terms that positively describe your personality:

- results oriented
- seeking a challenging position
- eager professional
- hard worker

Another way to elucidate a company's values is to ask value-based questions during your interview (see Appendix II).

One of the deciding factors in whether you get the job offer—and whether you are eventually successful—is your “fit” into the corporate culture. Each organization has a culture that reflects the ideas and strategies that are used to manage it. Corporate culture emanates from beliefs held by the key management at a particular point in time. This is not to understate the importance of technical competence; without it, you could not carry out your job responsibilities effectively. However, it is not the only factor on which you are evaluated and hired (or not). Your behavior on the job, which directly relates to your overall job performance, is also considered. Your beliefs and values play an important part. Unfortunately, many of us overlook the importance of “values matching” as related to career success.

Values are important because they help us to establish career objectives, develop and choose alternatives, evaluate our choices, and implement the decisions we make. As our lives change, so, too, will the relative priority of these values; however, the values themselves probably will not change. To avoid potential conflict, identify your dominant personal values and the needs they represent.

How do you know whether a company shares your values? Think about what is important to you, personally and professionally, in a position and in a company.

Ask yourself,

- Do I want a 60-hour workweek or a 9-to-5 job?
- Am I willing to travel on business or relocate?
- Do I work best with a manager who supervises me closely or with one who gives me an assignment and lets me run with it?
- Is it important to me that the company provide a relatively long tenure or rapid advancement?

Formulate some specific questions that you can ask during an interview. Here are some example questions that you can use or modify as appropriate:

- What is the level of turnover in the organization?
- How much travel is required?
- What kinds of opportunities are there to develop new ideas?
- Is there a management track and a technical track?
- Are there opportunities for teamwork as well as solo projects?

The better you know yourself—your skills, abilities, and values—the better prepared you will be to sell yourself to your ideal employer *and* to determine whether you really want the job.

The five major values that influence the decisions most people make in their careers are advancement, autonomy, balance, challenge, and security. If you can identify which of the most common values are important to you as an employee, perhaps you will find it easier to choose employers that meet your needs.

## **Advancement**

Individuals who want advancement seek recognition for their talents and accomplishments on the job. Even though they often want monetary rewards, a simple “thank you” for a job well done, a laudatory article in the in-house newsletter, or a new job title might suffice. Most employees hope that their careers will provide opportunities for upward mobility or developmental growth, but the person driven by the need for advancement feels this drive more profoundly. If such individuals do not develop and advance in their careers, they move to an organization where they can.

## **Autonomy**

Autonomous individuals have a strong need to do things their way, at their own pace, and in line with their own standards. These individuals may find corporate life too restrictive and may prefer a work environment that offers much more freedom, such as often can be found in consulting and teaching.

## **Balance**

Individuals who desire balance seek equilibrium in all aspects of their lives. They do not want to choose among family considerations, career objectives, and self-development goals. Their lifestyles will influence decisions regarding issues such as relocation, family needs, work hours, and employee benefits.

## **Challenge**

Individuals who thrive on challenge have a competitive nature, which drives them to overcome difficult obstacles and solve difficult problems. It is not unusual for these individuals to consider salary, job titles, and work area as secondary to the challenge of the task at hand. If such an individual is employed in an organization that does not offer challenging assignments, he or she will look elsewhere.

## Security

Security-driven individuals need stability and will seek an employer with a reputation for not reducing its workforce. They might look for jobs with tenure and benefits, such as those in government. These individuals are stable and reliable workers and will not challenge or buck the system. On the other hand, their success is tied directly into the company's success, which tends to make their job a personal statement about who they are.

## *Research the Company*

Few candidates realize just how important it is to become familiar with a company before the interview. Without doing the necessary background investigation, you cannot intelligently propose how you will be able to make a meaningful contribution to the organization.

Gather as much information as you can about the company. If the company is publicly held, obtain a copy of its most recent annual report. Annual reports contain information including the company's mission statement, goals for the coming year, highlights from the preceding year, milestones, and financial statements. They also may include useful news about the company's officers, recent mergers or acquisitions, various divisions and subsidiaries, and product lines.

Get to know your local reference librarian, a valuable resource who can direct you to information sources. Some general references include *Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives*; *Directory of American Research and Technology*; *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers*; and the manufacturing directory for your state.

If you know someone who currently works or formerly worked for the company, talk to him or her. Faculty members, who may have former students now in that organization, may provide helpful leads. Someone who works with the company—such as a vendor or a consultant—might be good to talk to, too. Try to amass as much information as you can, but remember that everything you hear is a product of that person's experiences, good or bad, with the company.

With all your information in hand, begin to formulate questions about the company or the position to ask during the interview.

Arriving for your interview after having done some research about the organization will benefit you in three ways. First, you create a favorable impression by showing you made the effort to acquaint yourself with the company. Second, you have set yourself apart from the competition, because few candidates bother to research companies they are interviewing with. Third, you communicate a certain degree of respect for the company (and the interviewer) by not saying, "Gee, I'm really not that familiar with what your company does." Without doing this research, you cannot reasonably expect to receive an offer of employment.

## *What To Expect*

The company's goal in an interview is to assess your accomplishments, skills, and personality to see whether they fit the needs of the organization. Your goal is to generate an employment offer. When you arrive at the interview stage, you must present your credentials in the best possible light. From a pool of many applicants, only a limited number of candidates were contacted for an interview, and only a few interviewees will be offered jobs. Because you have to assume that your competition is just as qualified as you are "on paper," you must stand out by being the best interviewee in person.

During the employment interview, the interviewer will focus on three areas:

- **Your qualifications for the position.** You were invited to the interview because you have the education and expertise. Now, show that you understand how to apply what you know to the task at hand.
- **Your motivation to do the job well.** Give examples of your leadership skills, initiative, and accomplishments.
- **Your fit in the organizational culture.** Demonstrate that you have worked well with people, that you will continue to do so, and that your values match those of the organization.

Most interviewers do not cover each area equally. Because technical qualifications are more apparent, easily defined, and thus more easily measured, some interviewers feel more comfortable asking candidates about their qualifications. Unlike technical qualifications, motivation and organizational fit are more abstract concepts; few interviewers feel sufficiently prepared to ask in-depth questions about these topics. Most interviewers may limit themselves to some basic observations about a candidate's motivation and some intuition about whether they like the candidate and think he or she is appropriate for the job.

Knowing that the interviewer will focus on these areas, present yourself appropriately. Review your technical knowledge, skills, and accomplishments. Communicate—though both your speech and your body language—your interest and enthusiasm for the position. Observe the people you meet during the interview and the environment they work in, so that you have an idea how you would fit in or contribute to the organization.

## *Communication Styles*<sup>1</sup>

The quality of communication is affected by how people perceive the world as well as by different styles of communication between them. By reflecting on your and others' communication styles, you can apply this knowledge to not only improve your interviewing techniques but also enhance the productivity of your work team, negotiate more effectively, and produce better oral and written reports.

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<sup>1</sup>This section is adapted from Robbins, 1992.

Employers always have valued good communication skills, but in today's workplace, the ability to communicate well has taken on increased significance. There is hardly a job that does not require proficiency in either oral or written communication—or both.

In your interview, your ability to communicate effectively is of the utmost importance. You must understand both your and the other person's communication styles, understand what information the other person needs, and present that information with those needs in mind. Misunderstandings occur when people communicate on different wavelengths. The more you know about your communication style and others' styles, the easier it will be for you to communicate effectively.

The key is the ability to recognize the other person's communication style and deliver a response that fits his or her style. If you listen closely, you can paraphrase some of the language he or she uses. Listen for clues about the kinds of issues that concern the other person, then incorporate them in your response. For example, if the person is decisive and results-oriented, he or she will not be interested in hearing all of the details involved in reaching a decision; you should be brief, specific, and to the point—not rambling. However, a person with an analytical bent prefers to deal with facts, logic, and data; provide all of the details that he or she needs to process the information.

## ***Kinds of Interviews***

There are several different kinds of interviews: informational, screening, site visit, group, behavioral, and academic. Most interviews are screening or site interviews, but you should be familiar with all variations.

### **Informational**

In an employment interview, employers seek out candidates, set up the appointments, and find out what they need to know. In an informational interview, *you* initiate contacts, seek out potential employers, set up appointments, ask questions, and find out what you need to know. For example, if you want to make a career transition, you might use informational interviews to build your network and make contacts in your targeted field or career. Informational interviewing is a good way to find a position, although nothing may be available at the time of the interview. Your goal is to leave a positive impression so that when something does arise, you will be remembered.

Like all interviews, informational interviews require research, because you will want to ask questions about the company, its employees, and what they do. Also consider what you like to do, what you hope to do in your new career, and what skills you have that are transferable to your target field or career. Because you request the meeting, you will need to keep the conversation going.

Whether you write or telephone a potential contact to request an informational interview, you can structure your introduction in a number of ways, depending on your situation:

- If you are planning to change careers, say that you are looking for some advice and would like to discuss jobs in which your skills, education, and experience would be an asset.
- If you have already researched your chosen field or company, say that you want to ask people already working in the field or company some questions before you send out résumés.
- If you are new to the area, say that you want to investigate local companies before you launch your job search.
- If you have decided on a field or company, say that you want to seek feedback on your résumé, discuss how realistic your goals are, determine whether your talents fit the jobs available, and find out how to get your foot in the door.

An informational interview is briefer than an employment interview. Therefore, you have to formulate your questions around what you want to know about the company or the field. Ask open-ended questions that encourage your contacts to speak at length about themselves—questions that begin with “who,” “what,” “where,” “when,” and “how.” Remember to ask whether the person you interview knows anyone else you should talk to and whether you can mention his or her name when you contact that person.

## Screening

The dual purpose of a screening interview is to verify facts and to screen out inappropriate applicants. Campus interviews, National Employment Clearing House (NECH) interviews at American Chemical Society (ACS) national meetings, and even follow-up phone calls from recruiters to candidates are typical screening interviews. In these preliminary discussions, the interviewer determines which applicants will be invited for in-depth site interviews.

The interviewer, looking for a candidate with a solid background, will ask you questions about the experience listed on your résumé and, probably, additional information. The goal is to ensure that you have the skills and experience to qualify for the position. In a screening interview, the interviewer usually does not have the power to make the decision to hire; determining your qualifications—not your motivation and organizational fit—is uppermost in the interviewer’s mind.

Although it may seem that a screening interview benefits only the organization, it also is an opportunity for you to determine whether you are sufficiently interested in proceeding to a site interview. Ask only general questions about the position and the company. Do not try to control the interview; the time to ask more in-depth questions is during the site interview. Answer questions simply and directly, giving the interviewer only the desired facts. Your goal is to convince the interviewer to recommend you for a site interview. The interviewer may not have the power to hire you but does indeed have the power to screen you out, so proceed carefully.

## Site

The site-visit interview is arranged by the organization to determine whether to make you a job offer. It also should provide you with enough information to decide whether you would like to accept the job, if it is offered. The site interview will focus on the areas of your qualifications for the position, motivation to do the job well, and fit with the organizational culture. At this stage, you are a viable candidate, so impress the interviewer with both your questions and your responses. Also take the opportunity to observe and determine whether you could contribute, grow, and enjoy working in the organization overall and as part of a specific unit.

In most large companies, you will spend some part of your interview with a representative from the human resources department. This individual's responsibility is to provide you with information about corporate policies, including matters such as working conditions, benefits, and typical career progression. Remember that this person, too, will be assessing your personality and behavior to determine whether you will fit into the organizational culture.

At the end of the interview, you may be told when to expect a decision. If not, ask what the time frame is, or what the next step will be. If you do not hear by the specified date, call to ask about the status of your application.

### *Technical Presentations*

If you are a graduate or experienced chemist, you may be expected to give a technical presentation about your recent work as part of the interview process. You are not expected to disclose confidential or proprietary information, and it is perfectly acceptable to present your research in general terms or to use nonproprietary examples, as long as you say so at the beginning of your presentation.

This presentation is vitally important to your candidacy. It may be the group's only opportunity to form a collective opinion of you, and for many members of the group, it will be a chance for them to form their first impressions of you. You must handle your seminar professionally and persuasively. If it is mediocre or if you try to bluff your way through the discussion, it will be difficult for you to recover your credibility.

If possible, determine the makeup of the audience to properly gauge the level of your presentation and the amount of background material you will need to provide. Simply call the interviewer and ask who your audience will include. Also ask how long you will have for your presentation, and plan to stay within those limits; a typical technical presentation is scheduled for 45–60 minutes.

Ask yourself what part of your research and experience will be most important to the majority of the people in your audience and to the company. (The background research that you did about the company should help you make this determination.) Focus your presentation on three to five main topics. Highlight your accomplishments as related to each of these main points. If possible, tie your past accomplishments to the needs of the interviewing organization, its strategic mission, and the products it is interested in developing. Have handouts available if you think they will reinforce the concepts. At the conclusion of your presentation, sum-

marize your main points and, above all, give credit to your co-workers. If you are a graduate student or postdoctoral fellow, acknowledge your adviser and any funding agencies that support your work.

Keep your visual aids (overheads or slides) concise and uncluttered; do not overload the audience with tables of data. Use key words or phrases instead of rambling explanations. Talk to your audience, not to your visual aids; face your audience as much as possible. If you use a pointer, use it only to make a quick visual reference on a chart or to trace the relationship of data on a graph; do not play with it.

Be prepared to answer questions. Try to anticipate most of the questions you may receive, and practice your answers. To ensure that everyone in the audience hears a question, repeat it. Repeating the question also helps keep you calm and gives you a few extra seconds to formulate an answer to a complicated or multi-part question. Focus about one-quarter of your eye contact on the person who asked the question and three-quarters on the rest of the audience. In this way, you ignore neither the person who asked the question nor the rest of the audience, and you keep the whole audience involved in your answer. Do not preface your answer in any way; this may raise doubts that you are unsure of the answer or detract from your credibility as a speaker.

Thank the audience for their questions when the question period is over. For the rest of the site visit, reinforce the impression that you would be a valuable colleague by asking perceptive questions, answering questions thoughtfully and honestly, and listening intently to everyone you meet.

In addition to your technical presentation, you should be prepared to give a 10- to 15-minute summary of your research to the senior management, which may include scientists from disciplines other than your own. This short presentation should cover the subject background, project goal, research performed, conclusions, implications, and future plans. It is a good opportunity to demonstrate your ability to clearly communicate your ideas to people outside of your field and relate your research to different disciplines.

## **Group**

Group interviews are conducted for a variety of reasons, but mostly to observe candidates: how they will fit into the group, how they react under the pressure of talking to several people, or how solid their social skills are, for example. Sometimes, group interviews are held because time constraints prevent multiple individual interviews.

One goal of the group interview is to see how well you would blend in with your potential co-workers. For some candidates, this is a stressful experience; they become more self-conscious about what they say and do. Furthermore, instead of being evaluated by one person, the candidate is being evaluated by three, five, or more interviewers. Because the emphasis of a group interview is not so much on what you say but on how you interact with the group members, try to determine



the characteristics the group is seeking, then formulate your answers with this in mind. Do not feel that this experience is a trial in which you are on the stand and they sit as the jury; consider this event as an audition, with your interviewers as the audience.

## **Behavioral**

The technique of behavior-based interviewing is based on the premise that the best predictor of your future performance is the sum of your past achievements. The interviewer asks meaningful questions about past behavior. From the examples you give and information about your specific skills and abilities, the interviewer will make an assessment about your future performance. In part, this information allows the interviewer to make a hiring decision based on facts, not feelings.

Behavior-based interviews are more structured than other kinds of job interviews. You will be asked about specific instances when you exhibited particular skills. Aside from providing a self-portrait, this technique can bring out points or questions the interviewer would not have otherwise considered. The structured nature of behavior-based interviewing tends to rule out the interviewer's intuitive feelings.

Another advantage is that all applicants are asked the same questions, thus eliminating the possibility of interviewer bias. However, there are a few potential pitfalls: overreliance on the past instead of the present and the future, an interviewer's assumption that people never change, and an applicant's tendency to talk too much. If you understand the theory behind behavior-based interviews and prepare for them, you will be more confident and better equipped to convince interviewers that you are the best choice for the job.

### *Preparation*

Preparing for a behavioral interview is much like preparing for any other one. As always, it is essential that you know about the prospective employer and the job. When you are contacted to schedule an interview, request a copy of the full job description. This is a good way to determine not only what the most important skills required for the position are, but also how well your background meets those requirements. Review your self-assessment of skills and accomplishments, paying particular attention to the values that will affect your job choice.

### *Pitfalls*

Remember that behavior-based interviewing is just another interviewing style. Provide enough information to convince the interviewer that you are the right person for the job; don't say what you think the interviewer wants to hear. Therefore, in responding to the interviewer's questions, take the time to develop an answer, then support it with quantifiable facts. The quality of *what* you say, rather than *how much* you say (or how long it takes you), determines the effectiveness of your response.

Do not turn the response on its head. You may be tempted to twist your answers to avoid saying anything negative about yourself (and sound like you're responding to a hypothetical question). If you really can't think of an example, say so, then give a hypothetical example of how you might behave.

Answer all the questions the interviewer asks, not only the ones you prepared for. Do not evade any questions.

### *Responses*

Here are two questions a behavior-based interviewer might ask:

- Tell me about a time when you were criticized. What was the issue involved, who made the criticism, and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you were under enormous pressure. What was the source of the pressure, and what did you do?

First, describe the situation in enough detail that the interviewer fully understands your role. Then, describe the action you took and discuss the results, quantifying them whenever possible.

### **Academic**

The academic interview normally requires some preparation in addition to that required for typical job interview. Of course, you must do your homework: Know the members of the faculty, the department, and the institution. Read any available departmental literature, the institution's catalog, and the *ACS Directory of Graduate Research* so that you are familiar with each faculty member's research interests. Be ready to ask questions and to present your research, both formally and informally. Bring to the interview reprints and/or preprints of your work, copies of your research proposal(s), and an estimate of start-up costs.

### *Research Seminar*

Prepare a 45-minute presentation that describes your current research. Include any background material necessary to inform your audience, a succinct statement of the problem, a description of the techniques used, conclusions of your work, recommendations for future studies, and any necessary acknowledgments (both individuals and sources of funding). Remember to make professional-quality, original (not borrowed) slides. When discussing your work and conclusions, remember that there may be an expert in the audience; do not try to bluff. Most important, leave adequate time for questions.

Your research seminar will be used not only to judge your knowledge and effectiveness as a researcher, but also to evaluate your teaching and communication abilities. A well-rehearsed, well-organized presentation is essential.

### *Research Proposal*

In addition to a formal research seminar, most university departments will request an informal presentation about your proposed research. This presentation, based on your written proposal(s), should be a succinct overview of your research interests. Discuss the amount of time needed to complete the work, and offer a realistic

sense of which agencies you would approach for support. Forearmed is forewarned: Be especially realistic about obtaining industrial support; junior faculty rarely obtain support from industry.

A research proposal should be reasonable in scope and effort; it should be neither too large nor too small. You are expected not to sketch out your life's work but to present an adequate outline of the work you propose to undertake in a three- to five-year period. The proposal should not necessarily be the length of a full proposal to the National Institutes of Health or the National Science Foundation; keep your focus on originality, relevance, and fundability.

Your request for start-up funds should include a budget for necessary equipment, so you should be knowledgeable about relevant existing departmental facilities. In addition to funds for capital equipment, typical start-up packages include money for supplies and expendables, student support (usually in the form of guaranteed teaching assistantships), and possibly a summer salary. There normally is some constraint on the amount of money available, but your request should be realistic. Make sure that you have the means to initiate (and continue) your program.

### *Other Factors*

Given the recent emphasis on teaching, you probably will be requested to provide a statement of teaching philosophy. This statement might include a list of courses that you are qualified to teach (both undergraduate and graduate), special topics of interest and expertise, and innovative approaches to teaching. The latter could include interdisciplinary courses or multimedia approaches to instruction.

Although the academic-related comments in this section apply mainly to interviews in university departments, with some modification they also apply to other four-year institutions. When interviewing at colleges, realize that your teaching abilities and commitment will be held in higher regard than your research history and plans. Your proposed research should include projects of manageable size so that there will be a reasonable chance of completion within an academic year or in a summer of research with undergraduates.

# Acing The Interview

Putting your best foot forward requires preparation, as you have already learned. In addition to professional and personal preparation, you have to remember to keep track of the details—what, where, when, and how—and look your best on the day of your interview so you will make the best impression possible.

## *Logistics*

As the date of your interview approaches, you will have many job-search-related details to keep you busy. Use these lists to keep your preparation schedule on track.

### **One Week Before**

- Practice interviewing with a friend or spouse.** Role-playing is a great practice tool. If possible, have someone videotape a practice interview and critique it. The ACS Department of Career Services offers videotaped mock interview sessions at all national meetings. Take advantage of the opportunity!
- Request that any forms be sent to you in advance.** Take your time to fill them out neatly and completely, without having to rush.
- Review and study your résumé.** No matter how many times you have read it before, read it again. Dates and achievements must be fresh in your mind so you will be ready to tell the interviewer all about them and how they match the company's needs.
- If your interview is out of town, confirm all transportation arrangements.** If applicable, call to confirm your seat, make sure that your car is reserved, and call the hotel to confirm your reservation and ensure that it is guaranteed for late arrival (in case your arrival is delayed). Review the procedure for submitting your expenses with the interviewer.
- Prepare a list of job-related questions.** To find out more about the position, you should ask why the job is available, how long it has been open, and how the department fits into the company's organizational plan. Do not ask a question just for the sake of asking a question. If you have no real reason to ask a particular question, you risk looking foolish. Know why you want the answer.

TWO

## One Day Before

- ❑ **Review the meeting details.** Who will you be seeing? At what time? How long will the meeting last? Where will it be held?
- ❑ **Review the address and directions.** Make sure you know how long it will take you to get there and what time you will have to leave. Jot down the time and place (including floor and suite number) so, even if you are a little nervous, you will still arrive at the right place at the right time. Make a note of the interviewer's telephone number so that you can call if you are delayed.
- ❑ **Pack the essentials.** In your briefcase or folder, place the information you have assembled about the company, the questions you have prepared, extra copies of your résumé, your publication list, a list of references, a pad of paper, and a couple of pens or pencils to take notes during the interview. Bring enough change for subway fare, parking, tolls, and telephone calls. Listen to the weather forecast to determine whether you should bring an umbrella or wear a raincoat.
- ❑ **Get a good night's sleep!** (And don't forget to set the alarm clock to leave you plenty of time to get ready.)

## *A Good First Impression*

You never get a second chance to make a first impression, so get it right. Arrive on time; there are no acceptable excuses for being late to an interview. You should look clean and well-groomed, because your appearance will influence the interviewer's final decision about you. Most employers will reject a poorly dressed applicant without hesitation. In fact, a poor overall appearance will likely leave a stronger impression than anything you say during an interview; such a negative impression often outweighs any positive one.

### **Dress for Success**

A good rule of thumb is to dress traditionally and conservatively; dress for the position you want—not the one you have. Your intention is not to look attractive but to be taken seriously. The interview is a business occasion.

For both men and women, good personal hygiene is the first and easiest way to make a good impression on your interviewer. Bathe, wash your hair, use deodorant, and brush and floss your teeth. If you have halitosis, take a breath mint before the interview. Be careful what you eat and drink before your interview—avoid gas-forming foods and large quantities of beverages.

Your clothes should be freshly cleaned and ironed. If you smoke, dry clean what you will wear to the interview to eliminate the odor. Have your outfit cleaned and pressed well in advance of the interview so you will not have to worry about wrinkles or stains at the last minute.

Following are some gender-specific tips.

### *For Men Only*

- **Suits:** Wear a conservative suit in blue or gray; black reminds some people of funerals. Brown is not a suitable color for everyone and, to be on the safe side, should be avoided. Solid colors are best; any pattern should be muted. The best all-season fabric for a suit is wool, followed by wool blends. Avoid knit suits or suits made of rayon and nylon fabrics.
- **Shirts:** A 100% cotton long-sleeved shirt gives a clean, crisp look. Short-sleeved shirts are unacceptable. The color should be white or blue; white with a very thin pinstripe is acceptable. In general, the shirt should be lighter than the suit, and the tie should be darker than the shirt. If you opt to have your shirts monogrammed, the monogram should be discreet, for example, on the cuff.
- **Ties:** An inferior tie can spoil the look of an expensive suit, but the right tie can give a boost to a less-than-perfect suit. It can reinforce or detract from your image, so make sure the tie complements—not matches—the suit. Avoid large floral patterns, large symbols, or big pictures; stick with the conservative classics, such as paisley or regimental patterns. The material should be pure wool, pure silk, or a 50/50 blend of wool and silk, which is easier to knot. Check whether the tie needs to be dry cleaned before the interview.
- **Shoes:** Choose good-quality wing tips or loafers. Make sure they are polished and shined, with no scuff marks, and that they match the color of the belt.
- **Other accessories:** Your belt should be black or brown. If you wear suspenders, do not wear a belt. Suspenders should have a subtle color or print and should button on; do not wear the clip-on variety. Socks should match or closely match the color of the trousers or shoes, and they should stay up, not scrunch down. Avoid large or loud patterns.
- **Jewelry:** The bare minimum is best (watch, college ring, and wedding band if you are married). Earrings and gold chains are inappropriate. Unless you wear a medical ID bracelet, avoid bracelets in general. If you wear French cuffs, make sure your cufflinks are simple and discreet in size.
- **Grooming:** Your beard or mustache should be well groomed and your hair neatly trimmed. Fingernails should be clean and filed smooth. If you wear after-shave lotion or cologne, go light—then wash your hands after you apply it, so you don't transfer the scent to the interviewer when you shake hands. Better yet, go without.

### *For Women Only*

- **Suits:** Like men, women should be conservative in their business dressing, but “conservative” does not have to mean “dowdy.” The basics for women are suits (with a skirt or pants) and dresses. If you purchase a suit, choose a wool, linen, or rayon-blend fabric in a solid color or a houndstooth check, tweed, or plaid pattern. Alternatives to traditional suit-dressing include separates (a blazer in one color and a skirt or pants in another, or a solid paired with a pattern), jacket dresses, and two-piece dresses. In any case, hems should be no shorter than one inch above the knee and no longer than midcalf.
- **Blouses:** Keep it simple; there are a wide variety of styles to choose from. If you are wearing a suit, the color of the blouse should contrast with that of the suit. Try a patterned shell with a solid-colored suit, or vice versa. If the blouse is sheer, wear a camisole underneath.
- **Shoes:** Wear conservative pumps or flats. Heels should be no higher than two-and-a-half inches; anything higher looks unprofessional. The color of your shoes should contrast with that of your suit, but avoid white and bright colors. Shoes should be polished and shined.
- **Other accessories:** Tasteful accessories can give your image polish, but don’t overdo it. Hosiery should be sheer (not patterned), with a hint of color that matches your skirt, pants, or shoes. Consider wearing a silk square in the breast pocket of your blazer or a patterned scarf to complement a solid-colored suit.
- **Jewelry:** Classic pieces in gold, silver, or pearl are fine, but avoid jingling bracelets, a ring on every finger, and long dangling earrings. Stick with button or small hoop earrings. A lapel brooch is perfectly acceptable.
- **Grooming:** Your hairstyle should suit your face and be easy to manage. Keep makeup to a minimum; avoid bright colors. Fingernails should be clean and filed smooth. Go light on the perfume or cologne so as not to leave a trail of scent behind you.

### **An Effective Introduction**

The first few minutes of the interview are the most important, because that is when your interviewer will form a first and lasting impression of you. How you look and behave will not only determine whether the interviewer likes you as a person but also set the tone for the rest of the meeting.

Begin the interview with a firm handshake and look the interviewer in the eye. Be enthusiastic in your greeting. Smile. Wait until the interviewer is seated or invites you to sit down. Do not call the interviewer by his or her first name unless you are invited to do so. If your interviewer is female and you do not know her educational or marital status, address her as “Dr.” or “Ms.”

If the interviewer tries to break the ice with some chitchat, realize that he or she is trying to put you at ease. One recruiter tells the story of a recruiting trip to his alma mater the day before a big football game. The recruiter thought that a conversation about the big game would be a perfect way to break the ice with the candidate. When the candidate arrived for the interview and the introductions were made, the recruiter asked, "So, what do you think about the big game tomorrow?" The candidate looked down at the recruiter and said rather sternly, "Sir, we're here to talk about me, not football." The interview went downhill from there.

## Be Honest

This sounds like an obvious piece of advice for an interview, but it is always a good idea to avoid the temptation to embellish your accomplishments. False information can cost you the interview or the job. If you exaggerate or lie outright and your statement cannot be corroborated later, you may find yourself in a great deal of trouble.

Your behavior is likely to give you away anyway. If you stammer or appear hesitant or anxious, an observant interviewer probably will ask follow-up questions that could expose the lie. Once your credibility is damaged in an interview situation, there's little you can do to recover.

If you are asked whether you can perform a certain task and you dishonestly say yes, it will be very embarrassing to admit that you cannot once you are on the job. You probably will lose your job on the basis of this misrepresentation. Most company policies call for immediate dismissal when it is discovered that an employee falsified information or credentials in order to obtain a job.

No matter how much you want the job, go about it honestly.

## Listen

Pay attention to *what* is said and *how* it is said. The interview is a conversation, not an interrogation. Strive to spend 50% of your time listening and 50% talking, so the time you are listening is very important. Often, interviewers will drop cues about the company through what they say during an interview.

At some point during your interview, the interviewer will ask whether you would like to ask any questions. You should have prepared questions about things that are important to you. If not, your interviewer may think that you are either not inquisitive or not sufficiently interested in the job. (See Part 3 for some example questions you can ask.)

Another way to learn about the company as you go through the interview is to observe how people act and interact with each other. Are the people you meet formal or informal, friendly or reserved? Would you enjoy working in this environment? If you see a bulletin board, stop and look at it. Are job openings posted? If so, what kinds? Are there any flyers announcing company activities, such as a softball team or a picnic?



## Power Lunch Etiquette

If your interview includes lunch, remember that it is not a break from your meeting; you are still being observed to see how you conduct yourself. If you need to brush up on table manners, borrow or buy a book about social etiquette.

Here is some general advice to help get you through the meal without any major faux pas. In short, being thoughtful and considerate of your eating companions is the best policy.

### *Ordering*

Do not order the most expensive item on the menu—tempting though it may be—but do not feel obliged to order the cheapest, either. Avoid messy finger foods, such as ribs or overstuffed sandwiches. If you order a salad, request dressing on the side so you will not get splattered as you cut up the salad. It is a good idea to avoid alcoholic beverages if they are offered; stick with sparkling water, soda, or iced tea.

### *Posture*

Sit comfortably straight; do not slouch. Keep your elbows at your sides instead of on the table.

### *Table Manners*

Chew carefully, and swallow before you speak. Ask the person closest to the salt, pepper, cream, sugar, etc. to pass the item to you; do not reach across the table to get it yourself. If there is a problem with your meal, discreetly bring it to the waiter's attention.

### *Logistics*

Place your napkin in your lap—do not tuck it into your shirt collar—when you sit down. If you must leave the table during your meal, fold the napkin, place it on your chair, and push your chair in. When the meal is over and you are leaving the table, place your napkin beside your plate. If the plates have been removed, place the napkin in the center of your place.

The number of utensils depends on the number of courses. The general rule is to start with the utensils farthest from the plate and work your way in. If you have two forks, for example, the smaller fork on the outside is for the salad and the larger fork on the inside is for the entree. The dessert fork or spoon is centered above the plate. If there are both, the fork is for dessert and the spoon is for coffee.

### *The Bill*

If, at the end of the meal, the waiter places the bill on your side of the table, do not attempt to pick it up. The interviewer will pick it up, because he or she is your host. Never offer to split the check, either, but thank the interviewer for the hospitality and the meal.

## *Closing*

When the interview is coming to a close, exit gracefully by asking job-related questions and reviewing the job requirements with the interviewer. Bring up any of your relevant strengths that have not been discussed. It is perfectly appropriate to ask, "Is there anything else about my accomplishments or skills and abilities that you would like to know?"

Save discussion about salary, vacation, and benefits for the negotiation process, once you have an offer in hand. Without an offer, you have nothing to negotiate. Candidates who bring up these topics too early in the interview leave the impression that they are only interested in what they can get from the company.

Ask the interviewer about the time frame for making a decision, but don't force an early decision. Do not mislead the interviewer by saying you have other offers to consider if they do not exist. Otherwise, you will irritate the interviewer, make yourself look foolish, and weaken your negotiating position. Do ask whether there will be a subsequent round of interviewing. If there will be another interview, ask whether you can schedule it before you leave.

It is highly unlikely that you will be offered a job on the spot, so do not be discouraged if that does not happen. Leave the interview the same way you started it: Look the interviewer in the eye, smile, and shake hands firmly. Be sure to let the interviewer know that you are enthusiastic about the job and the company, you enjoyed the meeting, and you look forward to hearing from him or her soon. Ask for a business card if you haven't been offered one.

## *Follow-Up*

### **Thank-You Letter**

Write a letter (preferably typed, not handwritten) to each interviewer immediately. Spell each name correctly, and use proper titles. Thank the interviewer for taking time out of his or her busy schedule to meet with you. Show that you were paying attention to what was said by mentioning something discussed during the interview. Say that you were impressed with the company, people, and position, but don't overdo it. Be enthusiastic about the job; say that you can do it and that you want it. Express confidence in your ability to meet the challenge of doing the job well.

Keep the letter short—less than one page—and mail it within 24 hours of your interview. Send a copy of this letter to the human resources office. If you have not heard anything after five days (or whatever time frame was determined for making a decision), call a human resources representative to determine your status.

Regardless of the kind of interview, do not use the thank-you letter to explain your qualifications. Keep it simple and concise. Its sole purpose is to thank the interviewer, not sell your qualifications.

If you have decided that you are not really interested in the position, send a thank-you letter anyway. You want to leave a good impression, because in the future you may want to apply for another job with the same company or be referred to another position. Also, you may end up working for a company doing business with this organization and would want to have created a lasting good impression.

#### *Informational Interviews*

If you had an informational interview in which no specific position was discussed, thank the person for their time and ask him or her to keep you in mind if a suitable position opens up.

#### *Screening and Site Interviews*

After a screening or site interview, thank the person for meeting with you to discuss the position. Reiterate your interest in the opening as well as your hope to work for the company.

#### *Out-of-Town Interviews*

If your interview was out of town and the company is covering your expenses, be sure to submit an expense account with your thank-you letter. Include all your receipts.

# Interviewing FAQ

## (Frequently Asked Questions)

This section presents some sample questions that an interviewer might ask during an interview, explanations of what the interviewer is looking for, and some suggested responses to common questions. Understandably, the questions asked of a recent graduate will be different from those asked of an experienced candidate.

In reviewing these questions as you prepare for your interview, remember not to memorize your responses; you may be asked a totally different set of questions! Consider this material a guide to the *kinds* of questions interviewers may ask, and spend time thinking about how you will respond to them.<sup>2</sup>

### *For Recent Graduates*

If you are a new graduate just entering the workforce, you probably do not have work experience for the interviewer to evaluate during the hiring process. Thus, interviewers will tend to focus on your performance in school, how open you are to learning, and how well you can translate what you have learned in school to work. As always, your goal is to stand out from all the other new graduates. This means avoiding pedestrian responses such as, “I’m a people person” or “I’ll do anything.”

#### **Q. Would you tell me something about yourself?**

A. The interviewer does not want to hear a long, rambling answer. You will need the interviewer’s help in narrowing down the scope of this broad question so you can give a satisfactory response. Ask, “What area of my background are you most interested in?” The interviewer then can specify what he or she wants to know about you so you can avoid giving irrelevant information.

#### **Q. Why did you choose chemistry as a field of study?**

#### **Q. Why did you select (name of college) to obtain your degree?**

A. These two questions are attempts to determine how you reason. Therefore, you should say that you went into chemistry because it was your favorite subject, for example—not because all your friends majored in chemistry. Likewise, you want to emphasize that your reason for attending a particular institution was the quality of the program or the presence of a particular faculty member you wanted to work

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<sup>2</sup>An excellent source of all kinds of interview questions is Yate, 1998.

THREE

with—not that your parents wanted you to or that your friend was going to go there. Your responses should emphasize that these choices were yours, and that, although you may have had some input from your parents, the final decision was yours, too.

**Q. Have you had a chance to work on any group projects?**

A. This question is an invitation for you to talk about something that you learned in school that could be used on the job. You could say that you learned a good deal about teamwork and interacting with others, which is something employers care a great deal about these days. You also could talk about a project that you did from start to finish and what you learned in the process. Stress what you got out of the experience that has prepared you for real-world situations.

**Q. Have your career plans changed since you began your studies?**

A. An interviewer may ask this question to determine how focused you are and whether you are drifting along without a game plan. If your career plans did change, be prepared to provide an acceptable reason why, for example, “I really liked being in a lab—hands-on work was my greatest strength, and I never thought about working anywhere but in the lab. Still, I like to read and enjoy being in libraries. In school, I had a senior seminar that involved a lot of library research that I really enjoyed. Recently, I talked to someone who is working in chemical information science, I decided to give it a try, and I’ve been happy ever since.”

**Q. If I were to call one of your references, how do you think he or she would describe you?**

A. The interviewer is looking for clues to what kind of person you are. Your answer to this question will reflect how you feel about yourself and what it would be like to work with you. Do not rattle off a laundry list of adjectives; select one or two traits that apply to you, and be ready to back up your answer with concrete examples. Stick with positive characteristics, such as “goal oriented,” “enthusiastic,” “able to talk and write effectively,” “team player,” “goes the extra mile to get things done,” or “someone who is not easily fazed by a challenge.”

**Q. What are your short-term goals? Long-term goals?**

A. Again, with this question, the interviewer wants to determine whether you have given some thought as to what you want to do with your life. Stay away from stale answers such as, “A job in management.” Your short-term goal might be to learn everything you can about the company and the industry, to identify where the opportunities lie. By that time, you should have a better feeling for your long-range goals. It’s difficult to form true long-term goals before you have some work experience to base it on.

**Q. We have many people applying for this position. What makes you more qualified than the other applicants?**

A. In one sense, this question seems unfair; the interviewer is asking you to compare yourself with the competition, about which you know nothing. Do not let that tactic intimidate you. Rather, consider the question an opportunity for you to sell yourself and your skills. Stress your positive personality traits (e.g., drive, motivation, and excellent communication skills), your desire to learn, and your ambition. Summarize the job description, and match each point with your skills. Leave the interviewer wondering what the company ever did without you.

## ***For Experienced Candidates***

If you are an experienced candidate, you already have a track record for the interviewer to evaluate. Therefore, you will be asked in-depth questions about your professional experience and past career successes. You will not be able to answer these questions right off the top of your head; give some thought to the questions, and frame your responses in a way that stresses your attributes.

**Q. What did you like (or dislike) about your last job?**

A. The best answer to this question is that you liked everything about it. Never, under any circumstances, should you criticize your former employer. Such criticism is considered to be a red flag that you might be a problem employee. Your answer should be short and positive, and you should state your goals for future positions. If you worked for a large company, for example, you might be looking for a position in a smaller company, where you can make a greater contribution. If you worked for a small company, you might be looking for a position with a large company, so you can focus on one or two major areas.

**Q. What have been some of your more significant contributions or accomplishments in your current job?**

A. If you have thought carefully about your skills and accomplishments, several examples should come to mind. Stress that you anticipate making significant contributions to your future employer as well based on your past performance; do not leave the impression that your greatest achievements are behind you.

**Q. What skills would you like to improve or develop?**

A. With this question, the interviewer may be trying to figure out what your weaknesses are. Avoid admitting something that could damage your candidacy. One approach to answering this question is to de-emphasize any weakness by putting it into a developmental perspective: "I have not had an opportunity to use Microsoft Excel, but given my proficiency in Lotus 1-2-3 and dBase, I do not anticipate any problems in picking it up." Another way to answer the question would be to reemphasize that you do have all the skills necessary to do the job but that you believe in continual professional development, so you are always trying to improve.

**Q. Where do you relate best—up one level, down, or with your peers?**

A. In answering this question, your goal is to come across as a team player. Your response should indicate that you interact well with all levels and kinds of people: You keep your supervisors updated on a regular basis, seek their input, and get them to support you. You motivate the people who work for you and delegate work to them based on their strengths and weaknesses. You coordinate projects with your peers and work together to meet deadlines.

**Q. Do you prefer to work in teams or alone?**

A. The interviewer wants to determine whether you are a team player. If your résumé highlights positions in which you did most of your work on your own, do not say you prefer to work in teams. Instead, say that you can work independently when necessary and do not need a lot of direction or reassurance; however, you are ready to make a change and be a part of a team because of the feeling of accomplishment when people pull together on a project.

**Q. What are you looking for in a new job?**

A. Be careful with this question. You should emphasize not what the company can do for you, but what you can do for the company. Talk about the contributions you anticipate making to the company or the opportunity to continue on your career path. If you are making some sort of career transition, frame your answer in terms of how your skills can benefit the company.

**Q. Why were you unemployed?**

A. If there are any gaps in your résumé, you must be prepared to explain them. Do not complain about how tight the job market is or how you feel that you are a victim of discrimination. Such behavior will certainly alert the interviewer that you may be a disruptive employee who acts as if your situation is everybody else's fault. Emphasize that you are looking for a place where you can make a long-term contribution, not for just another paycheck. Indicate that you like the company, the job sounds like what you want to be doing, and you want to be part of the team.

## ***How To Handle Illegal Questions***

Perhaps the questions that stump most candidates—and cause them the most stress—are illegal questions, questions that probe into their personal lives and backgrounds. Illegal questions are rarely intentional; it is more likely that the interviewer is inexperienced or unfamiliar with the laws governing employment interviews. Rather than assume the worst, remain polite and shift the focus from your personal life to your skills and abilities.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination against any person based on race, sex, age, national origin, or religion. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 covers employment of persons with disabilities. Additionally, many states, such as New York and California, have laws that protect people against discrimination in pre-employment interviews.

What constitutes an illegal question? Here is a guide to what interviewers may or may not ask<sup>3</sup>:

| ACCEPTABLE  | UNACCEPTABLE   |
|---|--|
| Have you worked for this or other companies under a different name?     | What is your maiden name?                            |
| Are you over 18 years of age?   | What is your age?                                    |
| What is your date of birth?   |  |
| This job requires work on Saturdays. Is that a problem?                 | What religion do you practice?                       |
| What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently?                   | What is your native language?                        |
| Can you perform this function with or without reasonable accommodation? | Would you need reasonable accommodation in this job? |
| Do you have 20/20 corrected vision?                                     | What is your corrected vision?                       |
| How many days were you absent from work last year?                      | How many days were you sick last year?               |
| Do you drink alcohol?   | How much alcohol do you drink per week?              |

As a candidate, you may feel caught between a rock and a hard place when asked an inappropriate question. If you do answer the question, you could be providing information that could result in your not getting an offer. If you don't answer it, you appear uncooperative. If you challenge the question, you risk appearing argumentative.

If you begin to feel uncomfortable and think that the line of questioning has become too personal, ask the interviewer to explain the relevance of such questions to the position. Remember that the goal of the interview is to get a job offer. Later, if you should decide that this is not the company for you, you can always reject the offer.

## Questions You Should Ask

Toward the end of the interview, you probably will be asked whether you have any questions to ask the interviewer. This opportunity is your invitation to demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company. It also will help you understand the responsibilities of the position and clarify your feelings about whether you want the job.

Do not ask a question just for the sake of asking one; an astute interviewer may ask why you are interested in that information and what it has to do with whether or not you will take the job. Here are some suggested questions for you to ask<sup>4</sup>:

<sup>3</sup>These questions are adapted from *The Wall Street Journal*, 1994.

<sup>4</sup>Some of these questions are adapted from Medley, 1993 and Yate, 1998.



- How long has the position existed?
- How long has the position been open?
- What is the time frame for filling the position?
- What do you consider the most important daily responsibilities of this job, and why?
- Why is the position open now?
- Who would I be working with?
- Can you tell me about the people that I would be working with?
- What are the department's goals over the next two or three years?
- What are the department's strengths?
- What are the reporting channels?
- To whom would I be accountable? Would I have more than one boss?
- What are my potential career paths within the company?
- How much overtime is involved? How much travel is involved?
- How frequent are the salary reviews?
- Are reviews based on merit and performance?
- How does the performance appraisal and reward system work?
- Does the company have an orientation program for new employees?
- Does the company encourage outside professional development training?
- Does the company cover any of the costs for professional development training?
- Does the company reimburse moving expenses for new employees?
- Would the company cover living and travel expenses while I find permanent housing for my family?
- Would the company assist my significant other in his/her job search?
- Would there be opportunities for increased responsibility and broader experience?

# Compensation and the Art of Negotiation

# FOUR

Before you formally accept a job offer, there is the question of compensation. If you are an entry-level candidate, the salary probably is not negotiable. If you are accepting a high-level position, however, you may have some room to bargain.

## *Salary Requirements*<sup>5</sup>

Ideally, you should consider your salary requirements in advance of the interview. You need to think about what you have achieved, what you have to offer, and what you are worth to an employer. As you think about what would be an acceptable salary for you, keep in mind that many factors affect how much the company might offer. If the company has had a difficult time finding the right candidate, for example, chances are that the perfect candidate could negotiate a higher salary than originally offered. However, if the company knows that many other qualified candidates are available and willing to take the offered salary, the company may not be willing to budge from a lower offer.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of filling the position and how long the position has been vacant are other considerations. Both the organization's interest in you and your interest in the position have bearing on the compensation level. You also have to consider the potential for personal and professional growth and development with the company as well as the potential for future promotion. Bear in mind that if you undernegotiate your salary, every subsequent raise will come from this lower base, potentially adding up to significant dollars lost over the span of your career.

Before beginning any discussion with the company over salary, first estimate what your minimum financial requirements are: rent or mortgage, car payments, insurance, student loan payments, grocery bills, etc. You do not need to discuss this amount with anyone, but it gives you someplace to start.

Second, find out what your skills are worth in the marketplace. ACS Career Services conducts annual salary surveys of the membership and annual starting salary surveys of new graduates in chemistry and chemical engineering. These surveys present data by highest degree, employer type, employer size, work function, and other demographic data. (For more information, contact ACS Career Services, 800-227-5558, ext. 6153).

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<sup>5</sup>This section was adapted from Beatty, 1988.

Third, come up with a figure that would make you happy. Do not be outrageous; keep it within the bounds of reality. You should now have three figures in front of you: the minimum you need to earn, an average figure based on the market, and your ideal figure. You do not need to discuss your minimum figure; you are left with the top half of the salary range you want. It represents the top half because it is much easier to negotiate down than to negotiate up and you want a starting point that works to your advantage.

## *Talking about Money*

What should you do if the topic of salary is raised early in the interview process? Although questions about salary are ordinarily raised after you are under serious consideration, do not knock yourself out of the running by revealing what salary you have in mind. For the same reason, do not indicate your salary requirements on the application form; write “open” or “negotiable.” If the situation arises, postpone talk about salary until you have more facts in hand and you are sure that the company considers you a serious contender for the position. Let the interviewer know that you still have some questions about the responsibilities of the job and that you would prefer to put off talking about salary until you have a full understanding of the position itself.

If the interviewer asks about your salary history during the negotiations, he or she is looking for the frequency, percentage, and amount of your raises—an indicator of your performance as well as the relative value of the offer the company makes to you. Your goal is to negotiate an offer based on the job for which you are applying, not based on your previous salary. You could reply that you are making a certain amount now but, because the job you are applying for is different from your current job, that figure may not be very useful in evaluating your worth for the new job. Be vague, rather than specific, about numbers, and keep in mind that an employer can verify your current or previous salary. You may be asked to produce a payroll stub or W2 form when you start work or an offer could be made based on verification of previous salary.

If the interviewer asks, “What are your salary requirements?”, there are a number of ways to respond. Your first option is to itemize what you would be doing daily as well as the scope of your responsibilities, then ask the interviewer what figure he or she had in mind for someone with your experience or, better still, what salary range has been authorized for the position. Another response is to state that you are certain the company will make you a fair offer, because you believe your credentials demonstrate that you are well qualified, and ask the interviewer what range he or she had in mind. Another good response is to let the interviewer know that you are expecting a salary appropriate to your experience and ability to do the job well, then ask what range the interviewer had in mind.

Your objective in answering the question of salary requirements in this fashion is to get the interviewer to reveal the salary range first. After you get that information, you can adjust your range so that the minimum of your range overlaps the maxi-

mum of the range the interviewer provides. For example, if the interviewer's range is \$45,000–\$50,000 per year, you can respond with a range of \$48,000–\$52,000. Now you and the interviewer have something to talk about. Remember that your goal is to maintain the advantage and keep yourself in a strong negotiating position by getting the interviewer to provide the information first. If you ask for too much, you risk pricing yourself out of the job; if you ask for too little, you do not know how much you are worth. The last thing you want to do is to give a specific dollar figure because then you have no room at all to negotiate.

## *Getting What You're Worth*

If the interviewer names a figure that is not quite as high as you thought it would be, negotiate an increase: You like the job, you know you will be successful, you are prepared to give it your best efforts, but the initial offer is lower than you expected—is there some room for negotiation? Most employers operate in one of three modes:

- **Take-it-or-leave-it deal:** There is no such thing as negotiation in this situation.
- **Set salary range:** A predetermined range has been set for the job, and your placement is determined by your experience. The top of the range is rarely offered to a new hire but rather is reached by a series of raises over the years. To increase the salary significantly, the job would have to be upgraded to the next range. If the employer has underestimated the necessary skills to perform the job well, this could happen.
- **Flexible salary:** The employer has the flexibility to adjust the salary as he or she sees fit. This is the best position to be in to bargain. However, if there are other candidates who are equally qualified and the employer would be happy with any of them, then your power to negotiate is reduced.

You can negotiate for a higher salary. Another option is to agree to a performance review after six months that would include a salary adjustment. Lump-sum signing bonuses are nice, but that money is not added into your base salary and will not be figured in for your year-end review. Because future raises will be based on your actual salary, you want to come into the job with as high a salary as you can negotiate.

Take a win/win approach to the negotiations; your attitude can affect the outcome. Be enthusiastic about the job and restate your ability to do it well. Ask about the overall compensation package and policy versus actual practice, then inquire about the salary. Let the employer know that you are very interested in the job and ask whether there is room to negotiate on the salary and/or benefits. Once the salary question is settled, you will need to address the rest of the benefits package.

## *Fringe Benefits*

Benefits are becoming an increasingly important part of employee compensation. In fact, whether benefits are offered (or how generous the benefits are) could be your basis for accepting or rejecting a job offer. From an employer's perspective, benefits represent a substantial proportion of total compensation costs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the mid 1990s, benefits amounted to nearly 30% of total compensation costs.<sup>6</sup>

A typical employer's benefit package may include health, disability, and life insurance; pension; sick pay; and paid vacation. Additional benefits that may be provided—albeit to a smaller proportion of employees—include relocation benefits, discounts on the services or products the company sells, credit union membership, tuition assistance, a retirement savings plan, dental insurance, a wellness program, child care, and adoption assistance.

You may be able to ask for a non-cash benefit, such as a company car, to compensate for a low salary. Seek some tradeoffs in the negotiation, but do not reject an offer out of hand because the dollars or other parts of the offer may not be exactly what you expect.

## *Evaluating an Offer*

Once you have an offer in hand, you need to evaluate it. Do not feel that you have to give an answer on the spot. Rather, when you receive the offer, ask for a reasonable amount of time to think it over. Use the time to consult with your significant other and other people whose advice you value. Do not fall into the trap of consulting with too many people, however. If you ask 8 or 10 people, you are likely to get just as many different viewpoints, and it becomes difficult to weigh so much advice along with your own judgment.

Perhaps the best thing to do with your advice is to put it on paper. Draw a line down the middle of a page, making two columns. On one side, label the column "Pros," (reasons to accept the job), and label the other side "Cons" (reasons to reject it). List your reasons in each column, then analyze your results. If you're lucky, one column will be much longer than the other. If not, then prioritize your reasons, giving more weight to the higher-priority items.

As you consider the offer, think about the base salary and salary potential, future career prospects, benefits, commuting time, the people you will be working with and reporting to, job responsibilities, and all the other intangible variables. Keep in mind your personal values and what you are looking for in a job:

- Do I like the work?
- Can I be trained in a reasonable amount of time, thus having a realistic chance of success on the job?
- Are my responsibilities likely to be challenging?
- Is the opportunity for growth in the job compatible with my needs and desires?

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<sup>6</sup>Data are from Levine, 1993–94.

- Are the company's location, stability, and reputation in line with my needs?
- Is the atmosphere or culture of the company conducive to my enjoying working at the company?
- Can I get along with my new manager and immediate work group?
- Is the salary offer and total compensation package the best I can get?

Remember that money is only one part of the evaluation process; salary cannot substitute for job satisfaction. Nothing is worse than waking up every Monday morning dreading the coming week.

Do not be misled by the gross salary figure. You are likely to lose anywhere in the range of 30–40% of that total to federal and state taxes. Add to that pretax deductions, such as your contributions to health insurance premiums. Also take into account your monthly living expenses (rent or mortgage, groceries, telephone, utilities, car insurance); commuting expenses (whether you will be driving your car or using public transportation); and debt (credit cards, student loans). Will you have extra to spend on entertainment? Figure out as best you can what you will have to spend *in after-tax dollars*, because that is what you will have to live on.

## *Accepting an Offer*

You may accept an offer verbally on the condition that you receive it in writing. Make sure that it covers salary, starting date, benefits, and any other details that you have negotiated. If you are currently employed, make it clear that you want to give your employer sufficient notice before starting your new job.

Once you have a written offer, notify your current employer, who will probably want to discuss things with you. If by chance a counteroffer is made, resist the temptation to accept it, for three reasons:

- The factors that prompted you to look for another position in the first place have not changed.
- If you accept the counteroffer, your current employer may doubt your loyalty.
- The prospective employer may conclude that you were trying to gain leverage with your current employer and that you were never a serious candidate.

Also, call the other employers with whom you have interviewed and explain that you have a firm offer with a certain time period for a response. Ask about your status with them. If you are not their first-choice candidate, they will likely tell you so. If you have the luxury of choosing from among more than one offer, decide which one you want and negotiate for the best terms you can get.



# Staying Marketable

Once you have landed your job, it is essential that you maintain your marketability. In the present marketplace, job security can be best defined as your ability to find another job.

## *Maintain Your Network*

Keep in contact with your former work colleagues and professional associates. Continue to cultivate as many professional contacts as you can. Collect business cards from everyone you meet, at conventions and seminars, for example. Note on the back of the card where you met, for future reference. Touch base periodically to see how things are going. The payoff comes when you need help or someone you know needs your help in recommending people for a job. This issue here is not only who you know but also who knows you.

## *Expand Your Knowledge and Skills Base*

There is a old saying that is applicable here: "The broader the base, the higher the tower." By all means, develop your expertise, but do not specialize to the extent that you become pigeonholed and jeopardize your future employability. Keep current in your field, but also stay abreast of what is happening in general in chemistry and, even more generally, in science. Continue to work on your communication skills, your interpersonal skills, and your ability to work as part of a team. Learn another language, such as Japanese, Chinese, Russian, German, or Spanish. Learn or develop business skills. Expand or develop your skills and knowledge in a related discipline, such as biology, materials science, or engineering.

## *Make Yourself Visible*

To make you and your abilities visible, take every opportunity to publish and present. Participate actively in professional associations such as ACS. Make the effort to communicate with and learn from your peers.

## *Be Flexible*

Expand the responsibilities in your current job by making a lateral move, taking a short-term assignment, participating in a task force, or doing anything that gives you a chance to see whether there are opportunities elsewhere in the company, even if it means relocating. Above all, make an effort to continue your education.

FIVE



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# Appendix II: Value-Based Interview Questions

## *Advancement*

1. What opportunities for personal growth and professional development are available for someone with my skills and background?
2. What kinds of company-sponsored programs support the developmental goals of employees?
3. What is the turnover in the organization?
4. Is there a technical track as well as a management track? What are the criteria for advancing in each track? How does the technical track relate to the management track in terms of advancement?
5. What criteria are used in selecting a candidate for a management position? What criteria are used in selecting senior personnel on the technical track?
6. Does the company have a policy of promoting from within?
7. Were previous incumbents in this position promoted from within the company? If not, what factors hindered their promotion?
8. What does the company look for in top performers, and how are they rewarded?

## *Autonomy*

1. To whom would I report? How are work results monitored? How frequently are work results checked?
2. How do new ideas get started in the company—through individuals' efforts, by committees, or by teams?
3. What kind of management oversight exists in each unit? Are there several layers or one layer?

4. Does the organizational design allow decision making at lower levels?
5. Does the organization have a work-at-home policy?

## ***Balance***

1. What characteristics are important for a successful manager (or technical person) in this organization?
2. What is a normal workweek? (Probe for answers indicating structure of the workweek, expected hours, and required overtime.)
3. How much travel is required to overnight meetings out of town?
4. Does the organization have a flex-time policy? Are there opportunities for job sharing, working at home, part-time positions, and telecommuting?

## ***Challenge***

1. What opportunities exist to support the development of research and new products that could be of value to the company?
2. What opportunities are there for creative thinking and brainstorming sessions, both on site and on retreat?
3. How much autonomy is there to allow for the creation of new and interesting programs and products?
4. Are job rotations available to enhance employees' professional growth? What criteria are used?
5. What are the greatest challenges of this position?
6. What resources do the company's top performers enjoy?

## ***Security***

1. What is the turnover in this organization?
2. Why did the last person leave the position? How long had the person occupied the position?
3. What is the company's policy for retraining staff versus reductions in force during tight economic times?
4. What opportunities exist for professional growth? Is there a career path built into the position, such as a technical track or management track?
5. If the position is funded by contract or project, what is the possibility of it becoming a regular, full-time position?

# Appendix III: ACS Career Services

The American Chemical Society (ACS) Department of Career Services exists to enhance the economic and professional status of chemical professionals by providing career assistance; contact with employers; and information about employment data, trends, and issues to aid in their career decision making. Programs and services are offered in six categories: employment services, personalized career assistance, workshops and presentations, workforce analysis, local section career programs, and career-related information (publications and videos).

Career services are available to all ACS members—full members, national affiliates, and student affiliates. For more information, contact

American Chemical Society  
Department of Career Services  
1155 Sixteenth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
800-227-5558, ext. 4432  
career@acs.org

<http://www.ChemCenter.org/profservices.html>

## *Employment Services*

- National and Regional Employment Clearing Houses (NECH and RECHs)
- ACS Job Bank
- C&EN Situations Wanted Ads
- Professional Data Bank

## *Personalized Career Assistance*

- Career Consultant Program
- Résumé Reviews
- Mock Interview Sessions

## ***Workshops and Presentations***

- Effective Job Searching
- Recruiters Panel
- Employment Outlook

## ***Workforce Analysis***

- Annual Salary Surveys
- *Current Trends in Chemical Technology, Business, and Employment*
- Women Chemists Report

## ***Local Section Career Programs***

- Local Job Fairs, Career Workshops, Job Clubs
- Networking Opportunities
- Access to Local Employers

## ***Career-Related Information***

### **Publications**

- *Professional Employment Guidelines*
- *The Chemist's Code of Conduct*
- *What a Chemist Should Consider before Accepting a Position*
- *Career Transitions for Chemists*
- *Careers for Chemists—A World outside the Lab*
- *Targeting the Job Market*
- *The Interview Handbook*
- *Tips on Résumé Preparation*
- *Teaching Chemistry to Students with Disabilities*
- *Working Chemists with Disabilities*
- *Coping with Job Loss*
- *Resources for Career Management*
- *Employment Guide for Foreign-Born Chemists in the United States*

### **Videos**

- *Career Transitions: Catalyst for Change*
- *Formula for Success: Turning Job Leads into Gold*
- *Developing the Right Picture: Résumé Preparation*
- *The Essence of a Winning Interview*
- *Your Career in Chemistry: Measuring Your Skills, Weighing Your Options*
- *Careers for Chemists* (prepared especially for students)



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