

THE KEY TO SUCCESS...



UNLOCK YOUR FUTURE CAREER!

THE CITY OF OMAHA Structured Interview Study Guide



City of Omaha
Human Resources Department
1819 Farnam Street, Suite 506
Omaha, Nebraska 68183
Phone: (402) 444.5300
Job Line: (402) 444.5302
Fax: (402) 444.5317
Web: www.ci.omaha.ne.us
E-mail: peremploy@ci.omaha.ne.us
Revised: July 2005

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Types of Interviews	2
Structured Interviews	3
Sample Structured Interview Questions	4-5
Answers to Frequently Asked Questions	6-7
Interview Tips	8

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

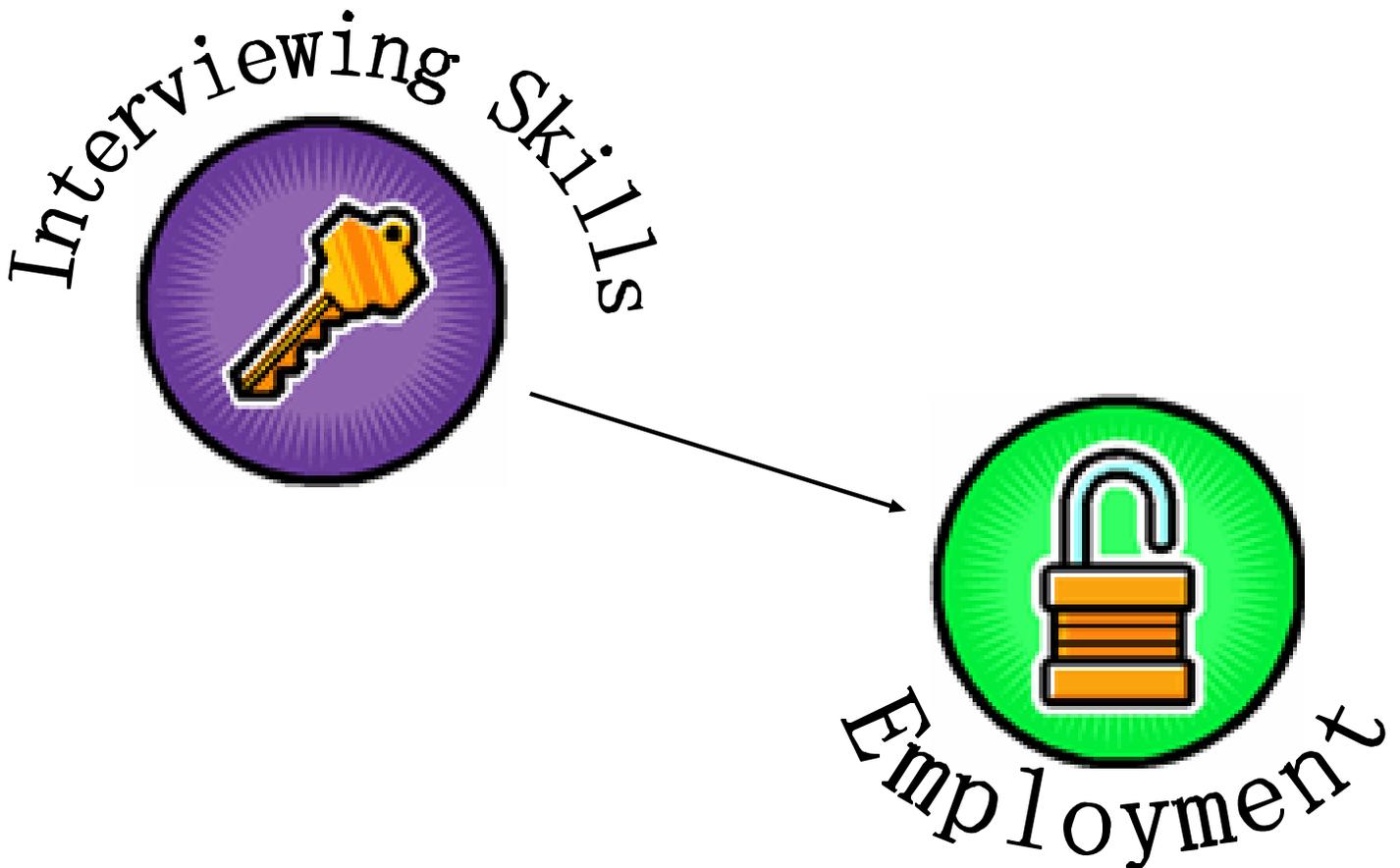
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study guide is to help you prepare for the structured interview process with the City of Omaha. In a structured interview, the interviewer explores certain predetermined areas using questions that have been written in advance. The structured interview is designed to give you the opportunity to describe the knowledge, abilities, and skills that you have which are related to the position that you are applying for. The information you provide regarding your experiences and skills is evaluated based on the specific job tasks. The interviewer has a written description or job analysis of the experience, skills and personality traits of an "ideal" candidate. This type of interview is very common and most traditional interviews are based on this format.

Some of the structured interviews conducted by the City of Omaha include the use of situational questions. Situational questions are questions that will describe a situation that may be encountered during the performance of your job duties. Your responses to these situations are measured against pre-determined standards or benchmarks. This approach is often used as one part of a traditional interview rather than as an entire interview format.

In a structured interview, each candidate is asked the same questions in the same order. Your responses to these questions are evaluated using a common set of standards or benchmarks.

This guide is provided as a starting point in your preparation for the structured interview with the City of Omaha. To prepare for your interview, you should read the information, tips, and sample questions that are covered in this guide to determine your areas of weakness. In addition, we strongly encourage you to use the public library, bookstores, and the Internet as sources to help you prepare for the interview and improve your areas of weakness. The main strategy that you use to have a successful interview is: PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE!



TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are several types of interviews that you may encounter when applying for employment with the City of Omaha. Some of the most common types of interviews are: informational, screening, and structured. Depending on the situation and the position, one type of interview may be better suited than others. Knowing what to expect can be your first step to success.

Informational:

Informational interviews are most often initiated by a potential applicant or someone interested in a given career field. These interviews give the potential applicant an opportunity to speak with those performing a given job. An informational interview will give the job seeker an opportunity to gain advice from someone in the desired field and learn about the day-to-day nature of a job with its rewards and demands.

- *Come prepared with thoughtful questions about the field and the company.*

Screening:

Screening interviews are a brief review of an applicant's education, training, and work experience to ensure that he/she meets the minimum qualifications for a position. Screening interviews are usually the first step of the application process, and are followed by other measurable techniques such as a written test or a structured interview.

- *Fill out your application completely. Be specific, the Screener cannot assume what your job duties do or do not include.*

Structured:

During a structured interview the interviewer has a standard set of questions that are asked to all candidates. This makes it easier for the interviewer to evaluate and compare candidates. The main purpose of a structured interview is to pinpoint job skills that are essential to the position. The responses to the questions are then evaluated and scored using a predetermined set of benchmarks (a standard rating scale). There are two types of structured interviews: Panel and Video.

A. Panel:

Panel interviews typically have three or four interviewers posing questions to the candidate. The Panels are made up of individuals from the hiring department as well as individuals from the Human Resources department. The questions are usually preplanned.

- *When you are talking to the panel, remember that you are talking to all of them and not just the person who posed a particular question! Also remember to keep eye contact with everyone on the panel.*

B. Video:

Candidates are interviewed on videotape by an interviewer or the candidate will read the questions from a written listing themselves. A panel of raters then evaluates and scores this interview. This interview is designed to measure specific personal characteristics, abilities, and skills required for a particular position.

- *Forget about the camera and the technology. Focus on your purpose and presentation. You want the attention and concentration to be on you and what you are saying.*

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE CITY OF OMAHA

The purpose of a structured interview

The purpose of a structured interview is to objectively evaluate the experience & knowledge that candidates have as it relates to a specific position. Furthermore, interviews provide an opportunity to assess the candidates' oral communication skills. You should not assume that the evaluators are familiar with your education and work history. Therefore, you should use the interview as an opportunity to communicate your experience and any other relevant information as it relates to the open position. Evaluators can only give you credit for what you communicate to them during the interview.

The interview process is designed to ensure that each candidate is treated fairly and equitably. At the conclusion of the interviewing process each candidate is assigned a rating or score that is used in establishing a list of eligible candidates for that position.

The Structured Interview Process

One of the ways in which the City uses interviews is to establish a list of eligible candidates for a wide variety of positions. The following is a brief outline of the structured interview process used by the City of Omaha:

1. The questions are established along with benchmarks and passing scores prior to the interview.
2. Often a panel is formed with representatives from the hiring department, the Human Resources department, and perhaps others with related experience or responsibility for a given position.
3. In some cases, the interview questions are provided to the candidate for review prior to the interview.
4. When evaluators are present, they will be taking notes in order to record the comments of the interviewee.
5. The responses to the questions are then evaluated and scored using a predetermined benchmark rating scale, and the results are compiled to create the eligibility list.
6. Each candidate will be notified by mail of the score.

Types of Questions:

During an interview several types of questions may be asked. The type of questions used in an interview depends on several factors including the level of the position, and the required duties for the position.

<p>Questions about your college experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you choose that college? • Have you participated in extracurricular activities? • How has your education prepared you for your career? • Are your grades a good reflection of your academic ability? 	<p>Questions about your characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you consider to be your major strengths? • How would your best friend describe you? • Tell me about a time you took responsibility for a mistake? • How do you evaluate success?
<p>Questions about your work experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would your previous employers describe you? • How do your past experiences relate to this position? • What kind of work environments do you prefer? • Are you a team player? 	<p>Questions about the a position/employer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors are important to you in a job? • What are you looking for in a supervisor? • How do you handle pressure? • Would you rather work with information or people? • What are your long-term goals? • How would you describe your ideal job? • How do you handle conflict? • Describe your experience solving problems that may be similar to our organization.
<p>Questions that are open-ended</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about yourself. • Why should I hire you? • What makes you unique? • What goals do you have in your career? 	

SAMPLE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & BENCHMARKS

Example 1: Bank Teller

The following is an example of a structured interview for a bank teller, and the corresponding benchmarks used to evaluate responses to the question.

Job Duty: A bank teller is responsible for interacting with customers to deliver and sell products and services.

Interview Question: Describe for us your experience in which you were required to effectively interact with customers in person and on the telephone to deliver and sell products and services.

Benchmarks (the criteria used to rate the applicant):

2 Points Full Performance:

Individual has the background to do this task with little or no guidance. This individual could advise, train, and/or act as a resource for other individuals performing this same position.

1 Point Acceptable:

Individual has sufficient relevant training and/or experience to do this task at the level expected of someone beginning work in this position.

0 Points Below Acceptable:

Individual has little or no relevant training and/or experience to do this task at the level expected at entry into this position.

Example 2: Recreation Manager

The following is an example of a structured interview for a Recreation Manager, and the corresponding benchmarks used to evaluate responses to the question.

Job Duty: Work involves administering, evaluating and inspecting diversified recreation programs and facility operations, preparing and overseeing the division budget, and supervising subordinate personnel.

Interview Question: Describe a time when your staff was really busy. How did you keep yourself and your staff motivated during that time?

Benchmarks (the criteria used to rate the applicant):

2 Points Full Performance:

Individual implemented new strategies to keep high morale and the staff interested. The team met their goals.

1 Point Acceptable:

Individual made an attempt to motivate employees through verbal compliments.

0 Points Below Acceptable:

Individual did nothing to motivate their employees and keep a high morale.

Example 3: Lifeguard

The following is an example of a structured interview for a Lifeguard, and the corresponding benchmarks used to evaluate responses to the question.

Job Duty: Ensure the safety of patrons.

Interview Question: Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for a mistake.

Benchmarks (the criteria used to rate the applicant):

4 Points Full Performance:

Individual has demonstrated the ability to accept full responsibility for their mistakes, but also goes the extra mile to remedy the situation.

3 Point Above Average:

Individual has demonstrated the ability to take partial responsibility, but goes the extra mile to remedy the situation.

2 Point Average

Individual had demonstrated the ability to take partial responsibility, but worked to rectify the situation.

1 Point Below Average

Individual took a small percentage of responsibility, and did nothing to remedy the situation

0 Points Not Acceptable:

Individual took little to no responsibility, and did nothing to remedy the situation.

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Q: *What is an interview?*

A: An interview consists of a series of job-related questions pertaining to the applicant's background, qualifications, experience, and ability to perform the target job. The interview provides an organization the opportunity to learn about the candidates' skills and abilities, and assists the supervisor in making a hiring or promotional decision. The interview also provides the applicant an opportunity to present his/her qualifications and skills to the hiring authority.

2. Q: *What is a structured interview?*

A: A structured interview is an interview in which all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order.

3. Q: *Who evaluates the interview?*

A: Responses to interview questions are evaluated by qualified individuals who are familiar with the skills and abilities needed to perform the target job. In some cases, the evaluators are supervisors within the hiring department. In other cases, the evaluators consist of both internal and external evaluators, with external evaluators coming from community groups and/or businesses and who have been thoroughly trained in the evaluation process. Evaluators may also be employees of the Human Resources Department.

4. Q: *What are the evaluation criteria that are used to evaluate the interview?*

A: Frequently, evaluators use scoring criteria, which are called "benchmarks" to assist them in making their evaluations. Benchmarks are statements of excellent, average, and poor responses that candidates may make in answer to interview questions. Benchmarks are designed to "anchor" the ratings made by evaluators, by providing a standard to judge the responses to questions along with the ratings (or score). The ratings (scores) correspond to these standards, thus making the rating process more consistent and reliable.

5. Q: *How should I dress for the interview?*

A: You should dress appropriately depending on the type of position for which you have applied. For example, if you are interviewing for an office position, professional wear is recommended, whereas "business casual" is appropriate for a foreman or crew-leader type of position. You should look at how employees in the organization are dressing, and then dress for the interview at one level higher than what they are wearing.

6. Q: *How should I prepare for the interview?*

A: There are a number of effective methods of preparing for the interview. Examples include the following:

- Brainstorm possible interview questions by reviewing any information you have about the job and anticipating questions that may be asked.
- Practice for the interview in front of a mirror, a friend, or a video camcorder.
- Have a friend or family member critique your responses. You should also critique your own responses.
- Make sure that you "put your best foot forward" and use the interview to present your skills and your ideas to the evaluators. Interviewers are not able to assess what they don't see. The responsibility is yours to ensure that your abilities are presented to the evaluators.
- Learn all you can about the organization, the position, and the career field.
- Talk to someone that performs the target job or a related position.

- Volunteer or perform related work. Use this information to help you prepare for the interview.
- Check out the City of Omaha's website before your interview (www.ci.omaha.ne.us). This might provide you with more information (that may be helpful during your interview) regarding the position that you are applying for and the department that you will be working in.
- Know who you are. What are your strengths, weaknesses? Be prepared to "sell" the knowledge, abilities, and skills that you possess that will be an asset to the City. Make sure that you take advantage of your opportunity to provide a positive picture of who you are to the interviewer/evaluator.

7. Q: *Where can I go for more information about interviews?*

A: There are a many resources available to you at your local public library, bookstores, and on the Internet. Below are several examples.

Books:

- THE EVERYTHING JOB INTERVIEW: ANSWER THE TOUGHEST JOB INTERVIEW WITH QUESTIONS AND CONFIDENCE. Bob Adams (2001)
- THE INTERVIEW KIT. Richard Beatty (2003)
- FEARLESS INTERVIEWING: HOW TO WIN THE JOB BY COMMUNICATION WITH CONFIDENCE. Marky Stein (2003)
- ACE THE INTERVIEW!: THE WETFEET INSIDER GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWING. WetFeet Inc. (2003)

Videos:

- Interviewing for a job: The most intimidating and crucial part of a job search is the interview. This program covers information on how to prepare for interviews, dress, use body language to your advantage, articulate skills and abilities, answer difficult questions, and handle salary and benefits issues. Cambridge Educational (Firm). 1 videocassette (20 min.)
- Interviewing: Your résumé and cover letter have landed you the interview for your dream job, but now what? What are you going to wear, what type of questions are they going to ask, and how can you insure that the interview will get you the job? All of your questions are answered in this information-packed video guide featuring career expert and best selling author Bradley Richardson. This video offers important interviewing guidelines, informed answers, and quick tips, so you'll be able to dazzle in the most important Q & A session of your career. Cerebellum Corporation. 1 videocassette (60 min.)

Websites:

- www.careerbuilder.com
- www.moster.com
- www.job-interview.net

INTERVIEWING TIPS

1. BE PREPARED!

- ◆ Know your exact appointment time/location, and arrive early. Plan your time wisely.
- ◆ If you are asked to bring additional materials, information, and/or references to the interview – be sure to do so.
- ◆ Bring a resume and any other information you have that demonstrates your experience, education, or skill knowledge. This will provide you with a resource at the interview that you can refer to.
- ◆ Be prepared to ask questions about the position you are applying for when the interviewer prompts you for questions. Be aware that the City's interviews are not interactive. Interviewers are not allowed to give you more information, or clarify questions. Take time to formulate your answers/questions before you speak.

2. BE PROFESSIONAL!

- ◆ Dress professionally and conservatively while avoiding extremes. This is not the time to express your individuality/creativity. You can demonstrate uniqueness through conversation, demeanor and your responses to the interview questions.
- ◆ Watch your manners! Never chew gum or smoke. Stay focused on the interview and organize your thoughts. Act professionally, using a friendly and personable approach.
- ◆ Sit comfortably without slouching. Look alert, enthusiastic and maintain eye contact, but don't stare. Don't fidget and try to avoid signs that you are nervous, such as finger tapping, leg swinging, etc.
- ◆ Make sure your speech/language is appropriate for the type of interview you will undergo. Avoid slang or wordiness. Speak so that you can be heard, and make sure your responses are clear and concise.
- ◆ Relax, smile, and take a deep breath before and during your interview.
- ◆ Eye contact is one of the most important aspects of nonverbal communication and can make a significant difference in how you present yourself. If you look away when speaking to someone, you're viewed as lacking confidence or interest. If you have a problem looking into your interviewer's eyes, try looking at the "third eye" right above and between the eyes.
- ◆ Smile, nod, and give nonverbal feedback to the interviewer.

3. WHEN ANSWERING QUESTIONS!

- ◆ Listen! One common mistake candidates make when interviewing is talking too much. It's important to listen to the question asked and answer that question. Keep your answers to two to three minutes at the most. When you limit your time, you tend to stay more focused. It is very easy to stray off the subject and ramble about things irrelevant to the job if your answer is too long. Watch the interviewer's eyes -- if they glaze over, you've lost them.
- ◆ Avoid long rambling responses, which don't answer the interviewer's questions and may use up the interview time. Make sure your answers are responsive to the questions asked and that you have answered all parts of the question. Each part of the question may be judged and scored separately.
- ◆ Avoid simple "yes" and "no" answers. Give responses with descriptive examples and try to paint a visual picture for the interviewer.
- ◆ Do not speak negatively of past employers, or place blame on others for your mistakes/faults.
- ◆ When asked questions regarding your experience, be as specific and comprehensive as possible. However, stay aware of your interview time limitations. Bringing a notepad and pen with you for notes regarding the questions asked can be helpful as you respond to the questions. Please be advised that the City will take any notes that you have written at the end of your interview to ensure security of the questions.

4. FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT!

You only have a few seconds to create a positive first impression, which can influence the rest of the interview.

5. THANK THE INTERVIEWER!