JOB INTERVIEWS:
BEYOND SURVIVAL

Do Your Homework!

— What are your interests and skills? What kind of work situation are you looking for?

— What job are you applying for? What organization are you hoping to join? What industry or field?

— How do your interests and abilities match up with this position? What makes you uniquely suited?

— Review any written materials you may have submitted before you go in for the interview. Until they meet you, this is their main source of information about you.

First Impressions: Get It Right, Right Off the Bat.

— Your interview starts before you arrive: in arranging your appointment, sending your resumé and so on, you want every contact to count. Leave nothing to chance: check for typos, return calls promptly, etc.

— Get there 10-15 minutes early. Catch your breath, be ready to start a little early, if necessary. Make an impression of energy and punctuality (and therefore of professional courtesey).

— Appropriate dress, neat appearance; eye contact, firm handshake, appropriate body language (relaxed but not sloppy; expressive but not frantic).

Dealing with Likely Types of Questions:

— STAR: organize your thoughts. Tell compact, on-target stories. *Know when you are finished!*
— Make a mental list of items, experiences and accomplishments you would like to be able to talk about, and look for opportunities to work these things into your answers.

— Don’t make the interviewer work to drag things out of you, but don’t ramble on and on.

— Get a feel for the interviewer’s style: if s/he interrupts you a lot, try to front-load your answers.

— Know what point you want to make in a given answer, and get to it efficiently.

— “Tell me about yourself.” Not a request for your life-story, nor an invitation to read your resumé aloud; tell a concise story of experience and (perhaps) personal qualities that make you particularly suited for the job.

— Don’t assume they have a photographic recall of your resumé and transcripts. They may need a little reminding of salient points.

— Other likely types of general questions address:

  Leadership
  Teamwork
  Communication skills
  Favorite/Least Favorite class or work experience
  Proudest Accomplishment
  Greatest Weakness
  How you deal with challenges, setbacks, etc.

— Turn lemons into lemonade: a seemingly negative question is a chance to talk about dealing with a challenge, overcoming a reversal, working to expand your skill set—show your persistence, your discipline and perseverance.

— Be succinct with background information—get past the set-up and get to the point!

— Draw on a range of experience: extracurricular, volunteer/service, arts, sports—but not too much.

— Dealing with hypotheticals or weird questions: go with the flow; share your thought process (that may be the whole point)—they may want to see how you approach a problem. If you don’t know the answer, talk about what you would do to find the answer.
— It’s okay to take a few quick notes (especially for more complex questions) and to
take a moment to think. Don’t take too many such moments, though.

REMEMBER TO BREATHE! REMEMBER TO BREATHE! REMEMBER TO BREATHE!

Follow-Up:

— Have some good questions of your own. Show an interest in a bigger picture, and
demonstrate how you might contribute.

— Send a brief thank-you note. Impress them not only with your qualifications but with
your courtesy—interviewers are also human beings, and will appreciate being treated
accordingly. They will be asking themselves “Will I want to see this person in this
lab/office every day?”

Practice—with friends, with campus resources such as the Oral Communication Program and the
School of Medicine Career Center. Interviewing is a kind of improvisatory exercise—which
feels much more comfortable with preparation.