

HOT TOPICS Top 10 Interviewing Blunders

You put a lot of time and effort into honing your resume and cover letter to perfection and they have done their job...you have landed some interviews. Time to sit back, relax and enjoy the well-earned fruits of your labor, right? Well, not quite yet. There is the small matter of actually landing the job or internship.

Now you need to turn your attention to the next phase of the hiring process, the professional interview. Unfortunately, some students tend to relax and let their guard down after scoring an interview. The professional interview is where you "seal the deal" and land that job or internship. Here are 10 very common interviewing mistakes that college students make and more importantly, how to avoid them.

1. Winging it.

A professional interview is not the time to trust in the ol' reliable gift of gab. Sure you can hold your own in a conversation with just about anyone, but the questions and the situation you will face in a professional interview may be different than anything you have experienced before. Those who do well in interviews invariably spend many hours, if not days or weeks preparing and rehearsing their interview answers ahead of time. So should you.

2. Limp fish handshake.

Nothing says "I lack confidence and professionalism" more than a weak handshake. Practice confidently offering your hand when meeting people and applying just the right pressure when they take it. We're not talking about the "kung-fu grip" here, just a reasonably firm, confident grasp. Smile and make direct eye contact at the same time.

3. Fast talk, low talk (a.k.a. mumbling).

This often goes along with #1 above. Some interviewees think that they can hide their lack of preparation by speaking fast and/or mumbling in such a low voice that the interviewer can't make out what they are saying. You should try to speak clearly and confidently in a volume that is slightly louder than normal conversation. Adequate preparation and practice will help even if you are naturally soft spoken or a speed-talker.

4. Dress for distress.

Your fashion choices for a professional interview form a lasting impression even before you open your mouth to speak. Ill-fitting and/or inappropriate clothing can derail your effort quickly. Again, preparation is key. Have that suit cleaned and pressed. Shine those shoes. Visit a tailor to make sure your attire is fitted to you. If you aren't exactly the fashion-savvy type, consult with a friend or family member who is. In general, dark, conservative colors and styles are preferable for interviewing.

5. Short answers.

An interview is a place to demonstrate that you have professional-level verbal communication skills (the #1 quality sought by employers). Yes and no answers will just not cut it. You need to cite specific examples and elaborate on significant details in each answer. Shoot for one to three minutes when practicing your interview answers. If your answers are too short - add more detail.

6. Not answering the question asked.

Nervous interviewees often make the mistake of not listening carefully to the questions they are asked. Instead of asking for clarification they may plunge into an answer that they "think" might be relevant. When in doubt ASK FOR CLARIFICATION. Try something like, "I want to be sure I understood you correctly, could you repeat the question?" Of course, even this strategy can be overdone say, if you need clarification on EVERY question they ask.

7. Failure to respirate.

Be conscious of your breathing during the interview. Calm and easy is the ticket. It may sound like common sense, but in the heat of the moment some people tend to hold their breath, or the opposite, breathe too rapidly. If you notice that you are breathing as if you just climbed 12 flights of stairs, or if you are about to pass out from lack of oxygen...take a long, slow calming breath and then proceed with the interview.

8. Lack of enthusiasm.

Nothing sells in an interview like genuine enthusiasm for the employer, the position, the opportunity. Lack of enthusiasm makes the interviewee seem bored or uninterested. Enthusiasm can be conveyed both verbally and behaviorally. Verbally, you should actually say how excited you are about the opportunity. Also, learning about and being able to share some details about the employer you are interviewing with is a sure sign of enthusiasm. Behaviorally, you should lean forward slightly toward the interviewer, maintain appropriate eye-contact and nod slightly as they speak. This strongly conveys interest and enthusiasm. As always, remember to SMILE!

9. Not discussing major/studies.

There is one essential fact that still eludes even many of our most savvy and career-enlightened students. In an interview they can wax poetic about their part-time job waiting tables or pouring beer at the local watering hole. When it comes to relating their academics to the professional world they often get stumped. Remember, your studies here at The University of Arizona "count" in terms of your professional career. Think of it this way, UA has been your "full-time job" for however long you have been a student here. You need to be able to discuss the experiences you have had and the skills you have developed as a student, just as you would for a very significant job.

10. Lack of professional follow-up.

80-90% of interviewees do not send thank-you notes after a professional interview. You need to be one of the 10-20% who do. This simple step can distinguish you among the other candidates. Send the note immediately after the interview, within 24 hours if at all possible especially if sending it by postal mail. Use email if the employer prefers that mode of communication...yes, you can ask which mode they prefer at the end of your interview.

Stop by an [Interviewing Skills Workshop](#) at UA Career Services for a more in depth exploration of how to nail the professional interview. Best of luck to you.

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