



The following is an excerpt from the booklet *Liberal Arts Interviewing Guide* by John W. Zehring

- ❖ **Be on time.** That means ten to fifteen minutes early. Sometimes interviewers are ready before the appointment time. Just imagine that good start if the door opens and you hear, “Hey, come on in, and have a cup of coffee, and let’s get acquainted.”
- ❖ **Know the interviewer’s name** and use it in the interview. Using a person’s name personalizes the conversation and adds warmth. If you don’t know the name, call the switchboard beforehand and ask.
Also, get the secretary’s name so if you need to call back, you can use it. Secretaries can have some potent influence.
- ❖ **Bring a spare copy of your resume** just in case the one you sent isn’t available. Demonstrate you’re prepared. And it gives the interviewer something to write on while talking to you.
- ❖ **Expect to spend some time developing rapport.** Don’t jump right in and get down to business. Get comfortable with each other. Whatever time you invest will be repaid tenfold for personal chemistry is a main ingredient in the hiring process. If they like you, the rest of the interview will go well.
- ❖ **Watch your non-verbal communication.** Pay attention to your physical posture and position. Maintain eye contact but don’t stare him/her down. Attempt to be at a reasonable distance from the other person, not too far or too close. Less than an arm’s length away is too close. Don’t appear over-relaxed or too rigid.
- ❖ **Don’t be embarrassed by nervousness.** They are probably nervous, too. In fact, nervousness can be a good sign, it shows you are taking this seriously. Avoid nervous movements, however. Your stomach can be churning and your knees knocking, but don’t fiddle with objects, twiddle your thumbs, or hang your leg over the arm of the chair.
- ❖ **Don’t play comedian** or try to entertain the interviewer. Unless, of course, you are candidating for a job as an entertainer.
- ❖ **Don’t exaggerate.** It will come back to haunt you.
- ❖ **Follow the interviewer’s lead.** Don’t try to take over the interview. Stick to the subject at hand, but don’t dwell too long on one point. Better to deal with many questions than just one or two in depth, unless that’s where the interviewer leads.
- ❖ **Be prepared for personal questions,** even some inappropriate ones. Very few interviewers know what they can and can’t ask, legally. Anticipate how you will handle personal questions without blowing your cool. One response, if you think a question is not appropriate is, “Why is it important for you to know that?”
- ❖ **Pay attention.** It’s embarrassing if you have to ask what was said!
- ❖ **Be sure you understand the question.** Feel free to ask for clarification, or restate the question in your own words. Don’t try to outsmart the employer.
- ❖ **Come prepared with a mental list of your assets as related to the job at hand.** This could include skills, experiences, knowledge, personal qualities, coursework, etc., that qualify you for the position. Be prepared to cite an example or discuss an experience which proves that you possess each asset.
- ❖ **Emphasize the positive.** Act natural, but dwell on the positive. Be frank and honest, but never apologize for lack of experience or weaknesses. We all have them. Have self-confidence but don’t be overconfident or cocky.
- ❖ **Don’t interrupt the employer,** unless of course, all of the interviewer’s questions trail off into silence or remain unfinished. A few interruptions are natural, but if you catch yourself always doing it be careful.
- ❖ **Wait for an offer to talk about salary.** Otherwise, don’t ask unless the interviewer brings it up.
- ❖ **Pay attention to your timing of answers.** Don’t stall on answers, but neither be overhasty in reply. Use silence and intentional pause to your advantage. Don’t feel the need to fill silence. Time is occasionally needed to think and reflect for both of you.

- ❖ **Emphasize what you can do** (your transferable skills) more than what you are interested in. Of course, employers want to know who you are and about your interests. But they are concerned most with what you can do for them. Focus on your ability to learn quickly and easily, your communication skills, your interpersonal abilities, your analytical thinking talents, and other hallmarks of a liberal education.
- ❖ **Don't try to give the "answer he wants."** Employers can see right through that.
- ❖ **Take a pen and paper, but don't take notes** during the interview. However, immediately following the interview, write down as much as you can remember as well as jotting down some of your feelings and impressions. After a number of interviews, you will be glad you didn't trust your memory to remember everything.
- ❖ **Be consistent. Avoid debate.** It is amazing how arguing with an interviewer can shorten an interview...and your chances.
- ❖ **Never slight a former employer or colleague**, or a teacher, an institution, or friend. It only reflects on you. If there were problems with previous experiences, try to put answers in the positive rather than the negative. If you slight a former employer, the interviewer assumes you will someday do the same to him/her.
- ❖ **Admit errors you may make.** The sooner the better. Of course, you say you would never intentionally make errors in an interview. But a mysterious thing happens—people get into the interview and even forget their names! If you catch yourself making an error or a contradiction, correct yourself. Better to stumble (and appear honest) than to get caught later.
- ❖ **Don't overplay your technical knowledge.** Avoid sounding didactic and showing off your knowledge. Be human.
- ❖ **Try to be as specific as possible.** Never say "I'll do anything." Take charge of your own life or someone else will take charge of it for you.
- ❖ **Watch your grammar.** Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves articulately and properly. Even if you have to go slow and correct yourself, accuracy is preferred over oratorical fluency.
- ❖ **Have some questions prepared.** When asked for comments or questions, have some. There is nothing wrong with taking in a 3X5 card with a few prepared questions and thoughts. It shows you're prepared. And it's better than not having any questions or feedback.
- ❖ **It can be useful to bring samples of your work** if you are entering a communications or creative field such as writing, graphic design or photography. Ask the employer in advance if they would like to see such materials.
- ❖ If you are in Richmond, Indiana and are applying for a job in Boston, Massachusetts, **suggest a half hour telephone interview.** Some employers, particularly non-profit, have hired candidates after examining written materials and talking on the phone for a while. It's the next best thing to being there. Even a preliminary telephone interview can help you assess whether or not it would be worth your time and expense to travel for a personal interview.
- ❖ **Don't expect an offer on the spot.** Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. If, by any fluke, you would be offered the position on the spot, it is appropriate for you to ask for one or two days thinking time before responding.
- ❖ **Be careful with closing.** More people blow an interview at the closing than any other time, except for the opening. If you are not good at closing conversations, don't linger. End quickly and be courteous. All too many candidates try to flatter the interviewer, trip over their feet (or tongues), and make fools of themselves at the closing.
- ❖ **MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL...Be yourself!** Don't act or trip over these guidelines. You don't want to get hired on the basis of something you're not. You want to be hired for who you are. **YOU.**
- ❖ No interview is ever completed until you follow-up with a personal thank-you note, reaffirming your interest. Easy to forget? Don't!