Interviewing & Networking

Career Resource Manual
# Career Resource Manual

## Interviewing & Networking

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## John P. Fahey Career Center

**Harper Center – Suite 2015**

2500 California Plaza Omaha, Nebraska 68178
Office: (402) 280-2722; Fax: (402) 280-3450
careercenter@creighton.edu
www.creighton.edu/careercenter

Office Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Walk-in Hours: Monday - Friday, 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. (when classes are in session)

## Mission

The John P. Fahey Career Center, as part of the Creighton EDGE, is committed to assisting students and alumni in exploring, developing, and implementing career goals that reflect their unique roles in the world of work and their commitment to a life of service to others.

## Core Values

Empower People - Develop Partnerships - Inspire Purpose
Introduction to Interviewing

The purpose of an interview is for an employer, organization, or school to determine if a candidate has the skills, knowledge, and abilities to perform a job or be successful in an academic program. Often a key piece of an interview is assessing “organizational fit” or whether the candidate would be a good match for the culture and environment of an organization. This is also an opportunity for the candidate to determine whether they would like to work for the organization or attend that school. This guide will give you a general overview of common interview practices and how to prepare. However, keep in mind that organizations run their hiring and interviewing processes in different ways and at different paces, so clear and open communication is an important tool in staying aware and prepared. Please visit the Career Center if you have any questions!

What to Know Before You Go

You got the interview! Now what? It is time to start preparing how you will explain to your potential employer exactly why you are the best candidate for the position. Focus on fit and what you can offer the organization. The best way to have a great interview is to be prepared, and the first step is knowing what to expect. Before you go, know the following 4 things:

1. **When is the interview?** This sounds simple enough but make sure you have a clear understanding of the scheduled interview time and plan to be there 10-15 minutes early. When the employer calls to schedule the interview, ask how the day will be structured. Some interviews are a short 30 minutes to an hour long meeting with one person. Others are day-long events with meals included.

2. **Where is the interview?** If you have the time, try making a “test run” to the interview site the day before so you know just how long it takes to get there with at least 10-15 minutes to spare. Make sure you do this at or around the same time of day that you will actually be making the trip so you can account for traffic or construction delays. Some organizations choose to conduct interviews over the phone or via a video chat tool such as Skype. If this is the case, you will want to test out the technology beforehand to make sure it works properly. In addition, be sure to reserve a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed during the interview.

3. **Who will you meet with?** If possible, find out the name and the title of the person(s) you are meeting with. If your schedule has multiple interviews, make sure you know how many people so you can bring a copy of your resume, cover letter, and references page for each in addition to a few extras just to be safe.

4. **What should you bring?** To project a professional image, bring a leather portfolio with you. Inside your portfolio, include extra copies of your resume, cover letter, and references page in case the interviewer(s) request a copy. It is also helpful to have a pen and a notepad with a list of questions for the interviewer(s). At some point, you may have your own business cards to bring, as well.

Other things to consider:

- Some interviews include practical elements such as giving a presentation or taking an assessment related to the position. Be sure to clarify with your contact what the plan is for the day of the interview.
- If the interview is in a different city, clarify the travel arrangements. In some cases the company organizes and funds your expenses for travel, but in others you will be expected to coordinate and pay for your own travel costs. Keep in mind that job search-related expenses are tax deductible when you file your personal income taxes.

How We Can Help

The Career Center is here to help you at all stages of the application and selection process. We conduct practice interviews in preparation for internship, part-time, full-time, and graduate/professional school interviews. To best mirror what your actual interview experience might be like, we can practice in person, over the phone, or via Skype. As you progress in the application and selection process, we are happy to help evaluate job offers and analyze salary data. Finally, if you have a phone or Skype interview scheduled and would like a quiet place with a landline to talk with your potential employer, you are welcome to reserve one of our interview rooms. Best of luck with your search, and let us know how we can help!
Do Your Research

After you’ve clarified the what, when, where, and who basics of your interview, it is time to do some research. The research process for an interview is twofold; you need to know all you can about the position and organization, and you also need to know all you can about yourself. As you clarify these, practice tying the two together.

Researching the Organization

The more knowledgeable you are about the position and the organization, the better you will be able to communicate to the interviewer how you will fit and contribute to their organizational goals. The best way to do this is to know as much as you can about the position, the organization, and the industry. Explore the following:

The Job Description
Many companies provide information as part of the actual job description. Start by reading through this information and note key points, but don’t stop there! Go the extra mile by being familiar with the organization itself.

The Organization
Research the organization on several fronts. The graphic below provides some ideas about what types of information to seek out and how to find it.

The Industry
Knowing the larger context of the environment that the organization is working within is a great way to show your knowledge and commitment to the field. Talk with faculty, mentors, supervisors, alumni, and friends that are familiar with the industry to give you the extra edge.
Researching Yourself

Almost all interviews, regardless of position, organization, or industry, will ask some version of these two questions:

- **Tell me about yourself.**
- **Why should we hire you?**

Remember, an important part of the interview is for the organization to get a sense of who you are as a person and if you will fit the culture of the organization. This is your chance to specifically address why you are interested in this position, their organization, and why you are a qualified candidate. Think about the job responsibilities and what about the specific company interests you. Consider your previous work, academic, and extracurricular experiences in addition to your skills and personality. What makes you unique and valuable for this organization?

Exercises to help you prepare

- **Job description** – Print out a copy of the job description and write down next to each of the requirements a time that you have done something similar. This will help you keep your answers focused on what they are most interested in, which is whether you can do the job.
- **Five stories** – Write down 3-5 stories from your work, education, extracurricular, and/or volunteer experiences. They can be things you are proud of or simply stories that stand out to you. Be sure to include details like who you were working with, what you were working on, any challenges, and the outcome. Then reread what you wrote about and make notes about what this story says about you in the margin. Perhaps your story was a time when you worked well under pressure or showed leadership skills. Maybe it says something about your personality or ethics. This is a good way to have several examples of things you are proud of to talk about and also helps you identify and define your strengths.
- **Take a personality assessment** – You may know who you are, but you might struggle with conveying this in an interview setting. Taking an assessment such as StrengthsQuest or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator can help you put into words what you already know. To get the most out of these assessments, review them one-on-one with a Career Counselor.
- **Transferable skills assessment** – If you would prefer a more involved, reflective assessment of your personality and skills, consider completing the Transferable Skills Inventory in the book “What Color is Your Parachute” by Richard N. Bolles. This book is available for checkout in the Career Center library.

What Employers Are Looking For

Interviews are about getting to know the employer and letting them get to know you, but they are also a time to highlight desirable qualities. Employers may have specific qualities they are looking for, but research on hiring practices identifies a few key skills that most employers desire. The Job Outlook 2016 Survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2015)* found that the top six qualities employers seek when reviewing resumes of recent college graduates are:

1. Leadership
2. Ability to work in a team
3/4. Communication skills (written) and Problem-solving skills (both qualities ranked equally)
5/6. Communication skills (verbal) and Strong work ethic (both qualities ranked equally)

As you prepare for your interview, think about success stories that provide examples of these skills. Many of these abilities can be assumed by the employer based on your resume, but the interview is your chance to further express these skills and talents.

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Question Preparation

You never know exactly what an employer is going to ask, but it is helpful to have an idea about what types of things they are interested in knowing. On page 9 of this manual, there is a list of sample questions. Below are several types of questions an employer might ask. Do not write and memorize every answer; instead practice a few at a time so that you become comfortable with things they might ask. Below are the most common types of questions:

Skills and Qualifications Questions – These straightforward questions are asked to find out whether you have the right background and experience the employer is looking for. Examples of these types of questions include:

- What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this position?
- Tell me about your experience managing projects.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your experience working with Microsoft Excel?

Personality Questions – Employers ask these questions to get a sense of the type of person you are. They want to know beyond your experience or technical skills whether you would be a good fit for the office or company environment and culture. Examples of these types of questions include:

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you look for in a supervisor?
- In what kind of work environment are you the most comfortable?
- Do you prefer working alone or with others?

Technical Questions – The purpose of these questions is to determine whether you have the required knowledge needed for the job. These are more common in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. Technical questions focus on programs, systems, theories, and/or processes needed to accomplish the job.

Behavior-Based Questions – These questions focus on past behaviors. They often start with the phrase “Tell me about a time when…” or “Describe a situation when…” What the employer is looking for is a real life experience you have had and how you handled the situation. To successfully answer these questions:

1. Give a concrete example from your work, school, or extracurricular experience. The employer does not want a hypothetical response or what you should do, but rather a concrete example of what you did.
2. Use the STAR method to structure your answers
   - Situation – describe the Situation so that they know the context
   - Task – identify the Task for which you were responsible
   - Action – describe the specific Action you took
   - Result – explain the Result of the situation based on the action you took
3. Focus on your behavior and how it affected the outcome as opposed to the actual situation itself. Employers are interested in the results you can produce.

Some examples of the behaviors that might be evaluated are (Hint: Read the job responsibilities to anticipate what types of behavioral questions you might be asked.):

- Adaptability
- Attention to detail
- Communication
- Coping
- Creativity
- Customer service
- Decision making
- Flexibility
- Goal setting
- Independence
- Initiative
- Influence
- Integrity
- Judgment
- Leadership
- Listening
- Motivation
- Organization
- Planning
- Policies and processes
- Procedures
- Presentation skills
- Sensitivity
- Stress management
- Teamwork
- Technical knowledge
**Verbal Tips and Tricks**
- Keep your tone and words positive.
- Give concrete examples to illustrate your value.
- Bookend your answer by referencing the question at the end of your answer.
- Keep your answers strong but brief (between 30 seconds and 2 minutes).
- Always answer the question asked.
- Take a few seconds to gather your thoughts before answering.
- If you can't think of an answer, ask if you can come back to the question later (don't do this more than once or twice) and be sure to come back to it.

**Questions for the Interviewer**
Employers want to see that you are as genuinely interested in them as they are in you. Asking good questions is a great way to show your interest. Questions can be about anything you are curious about such as the next steps in the process or working conditions. The best questions are about things like company culture, details of the job, or work environment. Here are some ideas:
- What does an average day look like for someone in this position?
- How would I be trained or introduced to the job?
- How would you describe the management style of the organization?
- Would I have opportunities to work on special projects?
- If hired, would I be filling a newly created position or replacing someone?
- What are the department’s goals? How do they relate to the overall organization’s goals?
- How would you describe the culture of the office?
- What are some of the challenges this department/organization faces?

Be careful to not come off like you have not done your research. When considering questions, ask yourself, “Is this information about the job that I cannot find anywhere else?”

**Illegal Questions**
There are three key laws that prohibit employers from asking certain questions about race, religion, age, marital status, number of children, etc. They are Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1991), and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1997). These do not prohibit employers from asking anything about these topics, but rather prohibit them from asking specific questions. They are allowed to ask questions that relate to the requirements of the job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Illegal Question</th>
<th>Legal Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Origin or Citizenship</td>
<td>Are you a U.S. citizen?</td>
<td>Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital or Family Status</td>
<td>Do you have children?</td>
<td>Travel is an important part of the job. Would you be able and willing to travel as needed by the job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Options for answering illegal questions**
1. Politely refuse to answer the question or ask, “How is this pertinent to the job?”
2. Answer the question, but keep in mind that you are giving information that is not job related.
3. Consider the intent behind the question and try to respond with an answer as it might relate to the job. For instance, if an interviewer asks about your marital status, they may be wondering if you will be available to work overtime. An appropriate response would address whether you are available for overtime. No explanation is needed about your personal circumstance.

Remember to answer the question asked of you with an answer that addresses the underlying concern. Some employers ask questions without thinking them through. However, if an employer is asking several illegal questions, consider if you really want to work for this organization.
Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why should we hire you over the other qualified applicants?
3. Why are you interested in this position?
4. Why are you a good fit for this position?
5. Tell me about a time that you worked under pressure and with deadlines.
6. What are your strengths?
7. What are your weaknesses?
8. How would you define success?
9. Why do you want to work for our company?
10. Why do you want to attend this school/program?
11. What stands out to you about our organization?
12. Describe your most ideal work environment.
13. Tell me about a time that you thrived at work.
14. Where do you plan to be in 3-5 years? What do you plan to be doing?
15. What do you find most attractive about this position?
16. What seems least attractive?
17. What are your greatest accomplishments?
18. What is your greatest failure?
19. Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself and worked to achieve it.
20. What do you look for in a supervisor?
21. What other opportunities are you pursuing?
22. Tell me about your leadership style.
23. What are key qualities that you admire in a team member? a supervisor?
24. What qualities will you bring to the team?
25. What important trends do you see in our industry?
26. What are the most pressing issues in our industry?
27. Why are you leaving your current position/did you leave your past position?
28. How would your friends/instructors/colleagues/supervisor describe you?
29. Who do you most admire in our industry?
30. What do you feel this position should pay?
31. What do you do in your free time?
32. Explain your experience with the software needed for the job.
33. Tell me about a book that you recently read/tell me about a movie you recently viewed.
34. Based on your experience, how would you streamline the task we are giving you?
35. Tell me about any patient contact that you have had.
36. Tell me about a time when you worked with a disgruntled team member.
37. How do you best receive encouragement? criticism?
38. How would you describe your personality?
39. How do you handle stress?
40. Tell me about a situation or a decision that you would handle differently.
41. How did you select your major?
42. Tell me about a time you showed initiative.
43. What classes did you enjoy the most? Why?
44. What classes did you enjoy the least? Why?
45. What was your most meaningful extracurricular experience?
46. Tell me about a time you had to make a split second decision.
47. Tell me about a time you worked with a difficult customer/patient.
48. Give me an example of a time you’ve done something to improve yourself.
49. What experience do you have giving presentations?
50. Tell me about a time you persuaded someone to your way of thinking.
Interview Attire

What you wear makes the first impression. Consider that the way you dress indicates to the organization the level of respect you have for them and the position. Even if the culture of the office is very relaxed and informal, the interview is still a formal process. If you are unsure of what is appropriate, always err on the side of more conservative and formal. The guidelines presented here represent the typical standard of interview attire. However, also consider the company culture. If the organization has a culture of self-expression and innovation, consider adding a bit of character. Color selection and accessories are a great way to add some personality while maintaining a professional look.

Regardless of what you choose to wear, how you wear it is just as important. Employers report that more often than not, they remember the way a candidate presented themselves rather than the specific clothing they wore. Immediate distractions include lack of personal cleanliness, including body odor, dirty fingernails, chipped nail polish, or uncombed hair. Tidy attire is also important, so make sure your clothes are clean, wrinkle free, and fit properly. Practice walking and sitting in your interview outfit to ensure that things fit appropriately whether you are standing, sitting, or crossing your arms.

Women: See examples above. The examples range from most formal (far left) to most casual (far right).

- Suit – pant or skirt, knee length or longer (black, navy, charcoal, brown, etc.)
- Blouse – can be button down or other professional top, avoid inappropriate fabric (t-shirt or sheer) and fit (too tight, low cut, revealing)
- Shoes – flats to moderate heel, closed toe, and conservative style (no cheetah print, sequins, stilettos, etc.)
- Hose or socks – pantyhose with a skirt, hose or dark socks with pants
- Jewelry – minimal, simple, and good quality; remove any non-ear piercings
- Hair – no outrageous colors; wearing it down is fine as long as you don’t play with it
- Accessories – should be minimal but is a good way to show some of your personality; consider the company culture as you are deciding what to wear

Men: See examples above. The examples range from most formal (far left) to most casual (far right).
✓ Suit – solid and dark (black, navy, charcoal, etc.)
✓ Long sleeve button down shirt – minimal or no pattern and no outrageous colors
✓ Tie – coordinates with suit and shirt, subtle color and design
✓ Belt – match to shoes
✓ Socks – dark color and tall enough to cover the shoe/pant leg gap when you sit
✓ Shoes – dark color and polished
✓ Jewelry – minimal if any; remove any visible piercings

Frequently Asked Questions
• What about my beard (goatee, mustache)? Usually fine as long as it is trimmed, shaped, and well maintained, although some very conservative companies discourage it.
• Do I have to wear pantyhose with my skirt? Not necessarily required but hose do portray a more professional appearance. Regardless, legs that are showing should look appropriate.
• Is my tattoo okay, or should I cover it up? Make sure all tattoos are covered during the interview.

Other Attire Tips and Tricks
• Do a practice interview wearing what you plan to wear to the actual interview.
• Know what your schedule looks like for the actual interview day so you can adjust your outfit as necessary. For example, if you will be walking a lot, choose more comfortable, but still professional, shoes.
• Ask clothing stores about student or new graduate discounts.
• If cost is a concern, consider shopping at garage sales or resale stores to find an outfit that might just need a good clean and a little tailoring.

Body Language

An interviewer's visual perception of you will be as much about how you present yourself as what you wear. What you say, what you wear, and how you present yourself, all indicate your interest and excitement about the position. A practice interview is particularly helpful to assess body language. The same physical movements can project confidence and excitement or entitlement and aggression. A Career Counselor can help interpret what impression you make and provide suggestions for how to present yourself.

These are the top ten body language mistakes according to employers (Smith, 2011)*.

Thank You Notes and Follow-up

When the interview is over, the waiting begins. How long the waiting game lasts depends on the organization and where they are in the selection process. Their final decision can take from a few days to a few months. Keep in mind that organizations often have internal and legal processes they have to go through, such as human resources paperwork and background checks, before they can make a job offer. Be careful about how many times you choose to follow-up, and ask a career counselor in the Career Center if you’re unsure of appropriate steps.

How do you strike the balance between showing your interest and calling too often?

1. **Follow their timeline** – Employers usually have an internal timeline they are following with certain deadlines for things like reviewing applications, finishing interviews, and start date. If they say they will not be making a decision for two weeks, do not call the next week to check on the status of your application.

2. **Ask about appropriate follow up** – If they do not volunteer the timeline or follow-up process at the end of the interview, ask. Consider asking when you should hear back from them and who to contact if you have additional questions.

3. **Avoid an Impatient Tone** – Rather than emailing a recruiter to ask when they will get back to you, just reiterate your interest in the position. This approach does not pressure the recruiter to respond but keeps you top of mind in a positive way.

4. **Stay connected through a thank you note** – A thank you note is a great way to thank the people you met with, demonstrate your continued interest, remind them why you are a good fit for the position, and keep your name fresh in their memory without bothering them too much.

**Thank You Notes**

Employers are busy, and it is important that you recognize and thank them for their time. Thank you notes should be short, to the point, and personalized. This is an opportunity to genuinely thank them and provide a brief reminder of why you are a good fit for the position.

**Sample Thank You Note:**

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. ________:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me this week regarding the Research Assistant position. Your insight as a faculty member was helpful in understanding the culture of the office. I was particularly impressed by your state-of-the-art facilities and how they allow you to better serve clients. This type of environment would match my technical skills and customer service background.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
(your name)

**Email or Handwritten?**

The method of delivering a thank you note is not as important as the fact that you send one. Email or handwritten notes are both acceptable, as long as the handwritten note is legible. When deciding which type to use, consider the hiring timeline and when the interviewers would receive the note. If they plan to make a decision in the next few days, email would be best so they get it in time. If they plan to make a decision in two weeks, a handwritten card delivered later could be a well-timed reminder of who you are. A good rule of thumb is to send the note one to three days after the interview. If you met with multiple interviewers, be sure to send each one an individualized thank you note.
Job Offers
One of the best feelings in the world is getting a job offer, but the application and hiring process isn’t over yet. Although accepting the offer immediately might be tempting, it is common practice to ask for some time to consider the offer. Somewhere between a day to a week is customary. Most employers are accustomed and open to candidates wanting to take a short time to reflect and discuss the opportunity with a significant other or family members. You also might need to take some time to assess what other positions you are being considered for or to do some salary research before negotiating pay and benefits. Politely express your deep interest in the position and ask if you can have some time to consider the offer. In your discussion with the employer, be sure to clearly communicate how and when you will talk again.

Salary Negotiation
Some positions will list what they plan to pay, down to the penny. Other positions will provide a range and still others will simply say “competitive salary and benefits available.” If an employer lists an exact figure from the beginning, they might be less inclined or able to negotiate. If the employer asks for a range, they are usually just trying to get a sense of whether your expectations match what they are able to provide. How do you know what is reasonable? Start by doing your research. Check out the websites below for salary information. Each pulls data from a different source, so consider averaging the numbers or going with the salary most commonly reported. Don’t forget to take experience, education, and geographic location into account. Err on the side of information that specifically refers to entry-level college graduates.

Salary Research Websites:
• CareerOneStop Salary Finder
• Glassdoor.com
• LinkedIn.com Salary Tool
• NACE Salary Calculator
• Payscale.com
• Salary.com

Tips for addressing salary with an employer…
…when filling out an application:
• Know what a reasonable range is based on your experience, education, and the geographic region.
• Respond with “open” or “negotiable” if possible.
• If they ask for a number, try to list a range. A $5,000 range is typically recommended.
…after an offer has been made:
• Know what a reasonable range is based on your experience, education, and the geographic region.
• Consider benefits as part of your overall compensation package.
• Clearly communicate what you can do for the company that makes you worth the requested salary.
• Understand that sometimes the employer is working with restrictions on what they are allowed to offer and may be unable to offer more.

Always let the employer be the first to bring up the topic of salary and avoid giving a concrete number during the interview process, if possible; wait for a job offer to discuss salary and benefits.

Juggling Multiple Offers
Many applicants are often in several search processes at the same time. If you find yourself in the situation with multiple offers, it is imperative to handle the situation professionally and ethically to ensure you are able to pursue the best option for you. There are many things to consider when weighing competing offers such as job responsibilities, base salary, signing bonus, growth potential, vacation time, company culture, health insurance coverage, and other benefits such as retirement or stock options.

Keep in mind you can also ask for a decision deadline extension. In most industries, 1-2 weeks is an acceptable request; some recruiters will allow up to 30 days. It is personal preference to disclose whether you are deciding between multiple offers. Above all, be clear in your communications with all organizations offering you a position to avoid losing out on an opportunity due to miscommunication or taking too long to decide.
Accept or Decline

If you are sure you want to accept an offer – after evaluating the offer for at least one to two days – it’s time to make it official!

Get the Offer in Writing:
Once both parties have confirmed an offer verbally, ask for a copy in writing. You should follow up the conversation with a thank you letter outlining your understanding of the terms of the offer, your enthusiasm about starting with the company, and your appreciation for their decision to hire you. Finally, report your offer to the Career Center to let them know you have accepted employment.

End Your Job Search:
Ethics dictate that your job search should end when you accept and commit to an offer.

Decline or No Offer
Not all interviews lead to a job. Maybe you left the interview thinking the job or organization did not feel like the right fit, or maybe they selected someone else. Either way, the manner in which you handle not getting the offer or not accepting the job is an important part of protecting your professional reputation.

If You Decide Not to Accept:
Think back to the interview, and if you feel it is not a good fit for you, it is okay to turn a job down. Making that decision will require you to consider several factors such as other opportunities, family obligations, and your financial situation. But if you are in a place where you are able to decline based on things like family and income, and the position does not feel right, it is okay to turn it down. If you do choose to decline the offer, follow these steps:

• Remove your name from the application process as soon as possible. Although getting an offer might be a self-esteem boost, the company may lose other eligible candidates because they were expecting you to fill the position.
• Be prepared to explain why if the company asks. Perhaps your reason was the amount of pay for the work or you felt the job required a more advanced skillset. Whatever the reason, think your answer through beforehand. The employer may not ask, but if you have a clear understanding of why you are declining, you will feel more confident in your decision.
• Be careful not to burn bridges. Employers not only share information with others in their company, they also share information with their colleagues from other organizations. To protect your reputation and future career interests, be polite, honest, and open if you choose not to accept a position.

If You Didn’t Get the Job:
Not getting an interview or an offer can be disappointing; however, how you handle the rejection is important.

1) Take some time – The emotional impact of not receiving a job offer can be heavy. Take at least 24 hours to reflect before making any decisions.
2) Follow up if possible – Sometimes employers will provide feedback about why you were not selected for a position. If you follow up, thank the interviewer again for the opportunity and politely ask why you were not selected. Ideally, you will receive feedback that you can use as you apply and interview for jobs in the future.
3) Take action where you can – After speaking with the employer and reflecting on your own experience, determine if you can do something to improve your application or interview in the future. Maybe a reference’s report was less than great or you did not sell yourself in an interview. Consider changing references or scheduling a practice interview with the Career Center or a friend.
4) Keep trying – Sometimes a rejection is not a reflection of anything you did; the employer just had a more qualified candidate. Having a good support system will help you handle the setbacks.
5) Visit the Career Center – We can give unbiased feedback. Whether it is conducting a practice interview or acting as a support during the difficult job search, we are here to help.
Graduate and Professional School Interviewing

Each institution is different in the way that it organizes interviews for graduate and professional school interviews, so make sure you understand the process. If the school does not offer the information prior to the interview, it is appropriate to ask the admissions office or the school contact prior to your arrival. Having a clear understanding of the process and practicing with friends and a Career Counselor will give you an extra boost of confidence prior to the interview. Below are a list of possible interview structures and factors to consider before your interview:

**Day or Half-Day Interviews** – Graduate and professional school interviews are often a combination of informational sessions for you to learn more about the school and interviews for them to assess you as a candidate. Remember that the entire day is a chance for them to evaluate you and for you to evaluate them, so be polite, pay attention, and ask questions throughout the day.

**Open or Closed File** – Some schools provide their interviewers all of your application materials (open) while others are provided no background information (closed). Knowing what information the interviewers will have about you prior to the interview will help you answer questions more directly.

**One-on-One Interview** – Most schools use a typical interview structure of 1 to 2 interviewers per candidate. You may have more than one of these interviews in a day. If you know the names of the people you are interviewing with in advance, do some research about them prior to the day of the interview.

**Multiple-Mini Interviews (MMI)** – This format is becoming more popular among medical schools. MMIs allow you to demonstrate how quickly you think on your feet and try to simulate the type of interaction many physicians have with their patients. You are typically provided with a scenario for 2 minutes and have 7-9 minutes to present your response. Questions or prompts include role play scenarios, ethical dilemmas, and typical interview questions. Be sure to ask what type of interview to expect when you confirm your interview date.

**Group Interview** – While it can be nerve racking to interview with a group of other candidates, listening well to interviewers and other candidates is the key to success. This interview structure is designed to evaluate both your answers and how you interact with a team of colleagues.

**Phone/Skype** – This type of interview is more common with graduate programs than professional schools. Find a quiet space or reserve one in the Career Center. Dress up and arrive prepared with a smiling face!

**Before the Interview**

- **Why This School?** Come prepared to answer why you are interested in the school (location should not be a primary reason). Consider what is unique, what stands out to you, and why you like this school above all others. This is one of the most important questions to get right because it helps the school see how you envision yourself as part of their mission.
- **Deficiencies?** Know what deficiencies are on your application and how to address them. This can take some practice; there is a fine line between explanation and making excuses for actions. You also do not want to linger too long on your weaknesses; the focus should be placed on how you overcame a deficiency.
- **Review Your Application:** Know what is on your application for that particular school. Read through your personal statement and any supplemental documents prior to arrival and be able to reference them directly. Many interviewers use your application to shape their questions.

**After the Interview**

- **Thank You Notes:** For good tips on thank you notes and processes, please see page 13.
- **Exit Interviews:** If you did not get a spot in this year’s class, many schools offer a period of time where you can schedule an exit interview. During an exit interview, you can ask questions about improving your application for the next year. This is a great resource and one that many schools use to see how motivated you are in your pursuit of the program.
Networking

There are many different ways and mediums to network. As you create a plan to build your network, consider your strengths and your current network first, and then engage in both informal and formal networking opportunities. Networking is really about building mutually beneficial relationships. The more care and time you put into building and maintaining your network, the more enriching the relationships will be throughout the different stages of your career. As you plan to expand your network, consider the contacts you have or could gain in the following areas:

- **Your Current Network**: Think about your close family, friends, faculty, former supervisors, advisors and peers that are doing interesting things that you want to learn more about. This is where you start and maintain the strongest network.
- **Social Media**: Creighton University’s LinkedIn Alumni network is vast – get involved in Creighton groups and others that are of interest. Please refer to page 19 for more information about networking on LinkedIn.
- **Conferences, Seminars, Meetings**: Take advantage of opportunities to engage with professionals.
- **Alumni Events**: Take part in alumni weekend and different gatherings for your program of interest.
- **Panel Discussions**: Talk to the individuals on the panel after the event.
- **Faculty and Staff**: Get to know faculty and staff and let them know what you are interested in.
- **Additional Online Databases**: Careershift.com, Vault, Jobs4Jays, and the Creighton Career Advisor Network are great resources to expand your network and learn more about organizations of interest.
- **John P. Fahey Career Center**: The Career Center is great at connecting you with alumni or others in your field of interest in addition to proving specific information on outcomes of recent graduates.

Informal Networking

When people think of networking, they often think of meeting and talking to people they have never met before in a large reception hall. Although this is only one of many ways to network, it can be a very efficient and effective way to network if handled correctly. In these informal networking situations, keep in mind a few things:

- Be aware of who you are audience is and start with general commonalities or talking points.
- Carry minimal items, setting them down or carrying over the shoulder so that you can keep your hands free.
- Be confident – smile, display good posture, and be ready with a firm handshake.
- Take note of who you know; this can be a good starting point, especially if they are talking with others.
- If you are uncertain of where to start, consider the person standing alone or begin with the refreshment area (people typically congregate around food, and it is a good ice-breaker).
- Listen well and ask questions, really get to know the person you are talking with, and use their name.
- Follow up via email or LinkedIn with the individuals with whom you had good conversations.
- Remember, networking is not about you; it is about building a relationship.

Informational Interviews

While many think of networking as the situation just described, networking can also be done in a more formal, focused way. One of the best ways to build your network while also exploring career options is through an informational interview. The best advice can come from listening to the personal experience of others. Professionals in your field of interest can provide realistic information about career options, employment trends, and job responsibilities. They may also be in a position to refer you to contacts in their industry. The purpose of informational interviewing is to help you gather information for career exploration and build your contacts; you should not contact individuals with the intent of asking for a job. Instead, contact alumni or other professionals in the community to gain insight regarding a career field, an organization, or industry.

What do you cover in informational interviews?

Details about a certain job, company, field, or industry are great topics for informational interviews, as are the educational and professional history of the person with whom you are meeting. Feedback and advice for you are also helpful topics to cover; however, remember this interview is an opportunity for you to learn about them, not vice versa. See sample questions on the next page.
Sample Informational Interview Questions

- Please tell me about your background. How did you get started in the field?
- What kind of preparation is typically necessary to get into this field? Is it required, or just the typical approach?
- What was your biggest surprise or challenge when you entered into this field or career?
- What is your typical day or week like?
- What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?
- What is a typical career path for someone in this field? What ensures continued advancement?
- Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?
- Please explain the typical hiring process.
- What skills are needed in this field?
- What advice do you have for me?
- Are there other colleagues you know of who would be willing to be contacted by me?

How to Request an Informational Interview

Once you have identified who might provide good interviews, you can contact them via phone or email to request a meeting. Be sure to lead with the commonality you have with them, whether it be that you both attended Creighton, are interested in a certain field, or have a contact in common. Then provide them a brief description of who you are, what you want, and how you can be contacted. See the example below:

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. ________:

My name is Billy Bluejay, and I am a Creighton student majoring in Psychology. I came across your profile in the Creighton University Alumni group on LinkedIn. I’m very interested in learning more about your career and industry as I am currently exploring which career path to pursue. I am interested in sports administration and am on several campus committees devoted to promoting and producing sporting events, both intercollegiate and intramural. My ultimate goal is to be in sports marketing and sponsorship sales, but I am also interested in other areas. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss sports administration and any advice you may have for me. If you are willing to meet, please feel free to contact me at (402) 280-0000 or at BillyBluejay@creighton.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,
Billy Bluejay

Elevator Pitch

Whether you are networking with employers at a career fair or just informally meeting someone for the first time, a polished elevator pitch is essential. What is an elevator pitch? An elevator pitch is a brief introduction—a message that you could share with someone in the short time it takes to take an elevator ride. Your pitch should introduce yourself, highlight your main skills, experience, and educational background, and convey your professional goal. When making your pitch to a particular organization, try to incorporate that organization in your pitch. The total pitch should be no more than 30 seconds in length. See the example below:

Hello, I am Billy Bluejay! I am a junior Marketing major at Creighton University. Currently, I serve as the Marketing Intern at ABC Company, where I coordinate social media and print marketing projects. I also have experience mentoring youth through Big Brothers Big Sisters. With my interests in marketing and helping youth, I hope to make a positive impact by utilizing my skills to advance worthwhile causes for youth. Therefore, I am very interested in your non-profit organization because of the work it does to provide important educational opportunities to children.

For more guidance on creating your elevator pitch, refer to The Elevator Pitch career clip.
Networking on LinkedIn

With over 500 million users across the globe*, LinkedIn has established itself as the premier professional networking site (LinkedIn, 2017). For almost all career fields, a LinkedIn account is essential to market yourself and stay connected in the professional world. There are two ways to search for and connect with other professionals.

(1) Click on the Search bar in the top-left corner and then “Search for people with filters.” After clicking Connect, make sure to “Add a note” to let the professional know why you are connecting.

(2) You can also use the LinkedIn Alumni feature at www.linkedin.com/alumni:

Search beyond your “1st” connections to broaden your search results.

Refine your search by Industry, Company, Keyword, etc.

Connect to your school’s network.

Filter your search by Location, Employer, Industry, Degree, and more.

For more guidance and webinars on LinkedIn, please visit the Networking page of the Career Center website.

Job Search Resources

There are steps to a job search, and it can be quite time consuming, but with the proper preparation and approach, your search can be more directed, efficient, and effective. A recent study reviewed how companies filled jobs and found employers hired 55% of positions from the hidden job market (through promoting internally and networking) while only 45% of positions were from the public job market (through resume search and job-posting) (Adler, 2013)*. For this reason, it is important to use a variety of approaches during your job search, and remember, it usually takes 3-6 months to find employment. Here are some helpful resources. Also, visit the Career Center website, see the Interviewing and Networking Career Resource Manual, or make an appointment with a Career Counselor for additional information.

- **Meet with a Career Center Counselor**
  - Prepare and review resumes and cover letters
  - Create a plan for your search, including how to network effectively and find position openings

- **Build and utilize your network**
  - Talk to friends, family, and acquaintances about job opportunities; you can also talk to people they know in companies or occupations that interest you
  - Conduct informational interviews with individuals who work in the profession you are interested in and/or who work for a company where you would like to work
  - Join and update your LinkedIn account. Join the Creighton University and Creighton Career Center groups to connect with alumni, along with professional associations to connect with professionals in your industry

- **Utilize professional affiliations and associations**
  - Search for industry-specific professional organizations to use their job posting boards and directories to identify possible employers
  - Consider joining a professional association as a student at a discounted student membership rate to network by attending conferences or communicating with other members electronically

- **Identify where to find jobs online**
  - Jobs4Jays – John P. Fahey Career Center job posting site: www.creighton.edu/careercenter/jobs4jays
  - Chamber of Commerce – if you are looking in a specific geographic area, view the local Chamber website; they often provide a directory of employers in the city
  - Human Resources for specific companies – if you have some employers in mind, bookmark their Human Resources page to view current openings and complete applications
  - City, State, & Federal websites – search for individual city and state websites, or www.usajobs.gov for federal postings nationwide
  - Other job websites and search engines
    - www.careerlink.com (Omaha jobs)
    - www.indeed.com
    - www.linkedin.com/jobs
    - www.simplyhired.com
    - www.careerbuilder.com

- **Use the Career Center’s library resources for additional search and career support**
  - VAULT Career Insider
  - CareerShift
  - Going Global
  - The Riley Guide

- **Consider working for a temporary agency**
  - Working for a temporary agency is a great way to gain exposure to different companies and receive an income while job searching
  - Temporary positions often turn into full-time positions

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