INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Prepare

- Review everything you learned about the organization when you created your application.

- Re-read the organization’s website and any literature, news articles, and any other information sources you can find.

- Think about how you are qualified for the position. Recall and note specific examples to support each point.

- Prepare (but do not memorize) answers to some key questions that may be asked such as: What do you know about our organization? Why am I interested in this position? How am I qualified? What makes me a prime candidate? What are my strengths and weaknesses?

- Be prepared to explain what you accomplished, why you performed tasks a certain way, what you gained from the experience, and how it helped prepare you for your desired career field.

- Develop substantive questions to ask the interviewer. Your questions should cover a broad range of topics: the organization’s direction and goals, philosophy and management style, career paths/career enhancements. Prepare multiple questions in anticipation of some of them being answered within the interview. Do not ask a question that has already been covered by the interviewer. A first interview is not the time to discuss pay, benefits, vacation, etc.

- Assemble materials to take with you to the interview. This should include copies of your résumé, a list of references, a portfolio if appropriate, and a pen and paper for taking notes.

- Know where you are going for the interview, how to get there and where to park. Allow enough time to arrive at the interview site 10 minutes before the scheduled interview. This is especially important if you are interviewing for a position at Cornell, or any other organization where parking may be difficult or at a distant location.

Dress & Personal Appearance

First impressions are extremely important.

- Ascertain how people in the organization dress and dress accordingly. If in doubt, dress conservatively.

- Business formal consists of a two-piece suit in a conservative color with a dress shirt/blouse. Business casual attire consists of a suit jacket with slacks/skirt and shirt/blouse. In some offices, khakis/slacks and a shirt/blouse may be the norm. If you
know the office dress code, one rule of thumb is to dress for the interview one notch above the typical dress for the position for which you are interviewing.

- Avoid perfumes and other scented products; consider removing body piercings, keep jewelry or accessories to a minimum.

**Practice**

- Be aware of what your posture, gestures, and facial expressions are communicating. For example, poor posture may be viewed as lack of self-confidence. Constantly referring to notes or your resume may suggest a lack of preparation.

- Familiarize yourself with the types of questions interviewers ask (See Sample Interview Questions on this site), and practice well thought-out answers in front of a mirror, with a friend, or with a tape recorder. You should rehearse (but not memorize) responses.

- Be aware that you may be asked behavioral interview questions. This technique involves questions about how an applicant would behave in a hypothetical, but realistic, circumstance. Although there is no way to predict the content of a hypothetical question, you should focus on positive outcomes or solutions to the problem.

- Be prepared to discuss your strengths.

- Be prepared to articulate your weakness. Try to focus on job inexperience rather than on personal limitations. Explain what actions you are taking to correct the weakness.

- Schedule a practice/mock interview, if possible. Simulating the interview can help you develop responses to questions and heighten awareness of body language and mannerisms. You can schedule a mock interview through the dual career consultant at Cornell.

- Be sure that you understand a long or complex question before you answer. Don’t hesitate to ask for clarification.

- Take time to think before you answer. Short pauses are acceptable. Learn to generate answers that are neither too long (over 2 minutes) nor too short (under 20 seconds). Avoid just “yes” or “no” responses to questions.

- Be aware of the nonverbal body language of your interviewer. This can be especially important in determining if you are talking too much for any particular answer. Watch for clues that the interviewer is connecting with you. You are on-track if he/she seems interested and relaxed, encourages you with nods and expressions of interest, and continues to maintain eye contact.

- If the interviewer appears puzzled, stop and restate your reply. If he/she has obviously lost interest (starts sorting through papers or looking around), ask if you have covered the point adequately.
Focus your answers by emphasizing your accomplishments and experience as they relate to the position. Consider using the STAR formula:

- **S** Describe a specific Situation or task in which you were involved
- **T** Be conscious of Time. Answer the question, but do not go on for too long
- **A** Explain your role and what Action you took
- **R** Describe the Results you achieved.

Reinforce the positive. Negative comments about past experiences could give the impression that you lack self-confidence and are hard to get along with.

Do not speak derogatorily about former employers.

**Application Status**

Before leaving an interview, make sure you understand the employer’s time frame and process for filling the position.

- If you have not heard back from the employer a week or so after the stated time frame, you may call and ask for an update on your application status.

**Follow Up**

- Analyze your performance after each interview by asking yourself: **Was I properly prepared? Was I able to keep the interviewer’s attention? Which questions gave me difficulty? Did I learn enough about the position? Did the interviewer learn enough about me to make a sound decision?**

- Following each interview, write a short and timely letter of appreciation (hard copy, US Mail) to each person with whom you interviewed. You should:
  - Include any information or documents requested.
  - Briefly restate any points that you believe may not have been communicated effectively or add an important point you may have forgotten.

**If you are not offered the position**

- If you receive a rejection, follow up with another letter reiterating your interest in the organization and expressing interest in future opportunities for which you may qualify.

- If you are not offered the position and want to learn as much as you can from the interview experience, it is sometimes acceptable to email the interviewer and ask if s/he would be willing to chat briefly with you to provide feedback that might help you improve your interview skills. Human resources professionals are often willing to do this, especially at Cornell. This option may be less likely if your interview panel did not include an HR professional.