

Section 3
Introduction to Interviewing

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This section is designed to provide an overview of the types of interviews and how they are typically structured. While this section is oriented towards an Orion Hiring Conference format, the tips included can be applied to any interview. Most transitioning military officers have never had to interview for a position. In the military, natural career progression and a demonstrated record of performance dictate the particular jobs you have secured. Corporate America is different. In order to secure the position you are targeting, you must be able to convince an interviewer that your military experience and your demonstrated track record of performance are a strong fit for their organization. The candidate who can best relate his or her background and strengths to an interviewer will be the one who gets the job.

Take time to read this and other literature on interviewing. This section breaks down different aspects of the typical interview, and the following sections will introduce you to interviewing techniques, common questions, and tools to help you prepare. As you review the information, identify the areas you feel you need to concentrate on the most. Begin developing examples and working through your answers and let us know if you need any assistance. Self-study is a critical component of your transition. Remember that the time you spend preparing is a tremendous investment in your future.

The career transition is not easy. As former Junior Military Officers, we understand the personal and professional stressors that you are dealing with. The Orion staff is here to assist and guide you through the transition process. Please consult us on any issue - the only bad question is the one that you do not ask.

Getting Started

There are 4 basic steps you should take when preparing for an interview: research yourself, practice, research the company, and prepare logistically.

Research Yourself

It is guaranteed that you will be asked a question that you did not prepare for during an interview, so it is crucial that you know and understand your performance history to be able to answer any question. You must analyze your strengths, weaknesses, successes and failures, in order to:

- Emphasize specific strengths during an interview
- Talk about specific examples using names, dates and places that you can relate to support your answers
- Sell yourself

We recommend that you lay out your evaluations, awards, and your resume and utilize Section 4 of this transition guide to begin organizing your experiences and associating them to common interview topics. As you learn about the STAR format, you will be able to expand these examples into a well-rounded interview response. We have also provided detailed lists of sample interview questions for further review and consideration. Once you have thought about the key situations that you want to use in your interviews, then you develop them further by practicing them.

Practice

Once you have organized your examples (as mentioned above), we suggest writing out your answers. This will help you formulate well thought out answers and will ensure you do not miss key details. While writing out your answers is a start, you must also take the time to practice your responses out loud, whether it is with the Orion Recruiting Team, a friend or spouse, tape recorder or by videotaping yourself to check idiosyncrasies. Know your resume and be prepared to explain the responsibilities, roles and achievements of each position. Thinking through your answers is not enough for most people. It is important to verbalize them. It is much easier in an interview setting to answer questions you have already practiced out loud.

Company Research

The first interview requires basic research to ensure that you have general knowledge of the company. The information you uncover in your research will allow you to ask thoughtful questions that illustrate a strong interest and potential fit with the company. The second interview will require much more in- depth research. For any interview, take time to understand the following information:

- Company Mission, Vision, and Values
- Current status, products, customers, competition
- History
- Corporate structure (HQ location, size, divisions, international or domestic, public or private)

If possible, talk to people who work at the company. Act like a prospective employee and you will be viewed as such. Below is a web site that allows you to research companies. It is a subscriber site but well worth the expense.

- Hoovers Online: The Business Network (<http://www.hoovers.com>).

There are also a number of free sources of information that can be helpful:

- Forbes Magazine online
- Wall Street Journal

- CNNmoney.com
- LinkedIn
- Company Website

Logistics

In order for an interview to go as smoothly as possible, you must make sure you are logistically prepared. Arrive early, look sharp, and present a professional image. Make sure your attire is ready and you know where the interview is. If you can answer the following questions, you should be set for your interview:

- What time is your interview?
- Who are you interviewing with?
- Do you have a phone number to call in case an issue arises and you may be late?
- Where is your interview?
- How long are you going to be there?
- How long does it take to get there?
- What is the attire for your interview?
- Is your attire ready?
- Did you remember to bring extra resumes in a professional folder (portfolio) with paper and pen?
- Do you have a brag book? If interviewing for sales, you must have a Brag Book (a 3-ring binder, with plastic sleeves containing resumes, evaluations, transcripts, awards). Learn more about Brag Books in Section 5.

Any logistical misstep can cause you to be nervous or rushed. If it happens, stay calm. Remember to check yourself in the mirror before each interview. Always have a phone number to call in the event that you will be late to the interview.

Types of Interviews

There are two primary types of interviews used by companies: a screening interview and selection interview. It is important to understand that every company's hiring process is different. Some companies may require only two interviews while others may require three or more. It is also not uncommon to see a company conduct testing (personality, skills based) as an intermediate step in the hiring process. Here is an overview of the major types of interviews and tips on how to handle them.

Screening Interview

Your first interview with a company will often be a screening interview. The purpose of a screening interview is to ensure that prospective candidates meet the basic qualifications for a given position. It may take place in person or on the telephone. If you meet the basic qualifications for the position, express interest in the

position, and make a positive impression on the interviewer, you will likely be selected for a selection interview.

Keys to Success

- Research the company. Read the job summary carefully. Understand the position and know the key attributes that the company is looking for.
- Using your research and the job summary as a guide, tailor your answers to emphasize the key attributes that you have identified.
- Know your audience. You need to know the background of your interviewer. Is the interviewer from Human Resources, or are they from Operations? Are they former military? The Orion Account Executive responsible for that company can give you all of that information.
- Be personable. All things being equal, companies hire individuals that they like.

Selection Interviews / Second Interviews

Selection interviews are typically conducted on-site at a company. The purpose of a selection interview is to determine whether a candidate will be selected for the position he or she is interviewing for. A selection interview is typically more rigorous than a screening interview. At this point, a company is trying to decide whether or not you should either be moved to the next step in the hiring process or an offer is going to be extended, so there will be more scrutiny on you. The company wants to know if you are qualified for the job. Are you a good cultural fit? Can you make an immediate impact or will you need extensive training? Questions will be more specific and your answers typically need to be more detailed. Selection interviews can come in several forms.

Round-Robin Interview

A round-robin interview is the interview technique most commonly used by our client companies. On-site, you will interview with multiple interviewers one after another. The key to a round-robin interview is giving good consistent answers and keeping your energy level up throughout the entire day. Interviewers will typically meet to discuss your answers and will scrutinize any inconsistencies. It is also very important to ask each interviewer questions, even if previous interviewers have answered them, so that each interviewer feels you are interested and engaged in the conversation.

Panel Interview

A panel interview is an interview that consists of two or more interviewers. Typically, each of the interviewers will ask questions. For a company, the purpose of a panel interview is to gain multiple perspectives on a prospective candidate in a time efficient setting. The key to a panel interview is to keep all interviewers involved, even if one person is directing most of the questions. They may or may not be the key decision maker. Make eye contact with all interviewers even when answering a question for a specific individual.

One-on-one Interview

A one-on-one interview is an interview with a single interviewer. The key to a one-on-one interview is to build rapport with the interviewer. Smile. Be friendly. Try to match your interviewer's energy level. Typically, you will have a short period of time to make an impact. Know the position and the key attributes the company is looking for and emphasize those things.

Stress Interview

A stress interview is designed to test your responses in a stressful environment. An interviewer is going to try to intimidate you. The purpose is to weed out candidates who do not deal well with adversity. The interviewer will make deliberate attempts to see how you handle yourself using methods such as sarcasm, argumentative style questions, or long awkward silences. The key to a stress interview is recognizing that you are in a stress interview. Do not take it personally. Stay calm, focused, and don't allow yourself to be rushed. Ask for clarification if you need it. Know how to push back. Tactfully ask an interviewer for a couple of problems they are facing and propose solutions. Be positive.

Irregular Interviews

Many companies prefer to evaluate a candidate in a non-traditional setting in addition to the standard formal interview. Common irregular interviews may be a lunch interview, dinner interview, field ride / job shadow, and a plant tour. There are a few keys to preparing for these interviews. First, remember that you are always being interviewed, so the same interview fundamentals apply here as they do in a more standard interview format. Next, always be yourself. One of the main purposes of these types of interviews is to get to know the 'real you', so be yourself, but always stay professional. Finally, engage in conversation and ask questions. Since an irregular interview often involves give and take conversation, make sure you are showing your interest in the opportunity by asking intelligent questions. Remember, your Orion Recruiter will be available to help you prepare for these types of interviews.

The Interview

Regardless of the type of interview being conducted, you should go into a prospective interview with a plan. Your plan should be built around the key attributes uncovered during your research that you must communicate to effectively convince the interviewer you are a fit for their position. Each of these attributes should be supported by real examples from your career. It is helpful if you think of the interview as a term paper comprised of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion with your key attributes forming your thesis.

The First 5 Minutes (The Introduction):

Like the introduction to a paper, an introductory portion of an interview is critical. During the first five minutes, you will set the tone for your interview. Make a good first impression. Look sharp and present a professional image. Relax, smile, and remember your plan. Your resume got your foot in the door, now you must effectively show the interviewer why you are a fit for the position. Keep the following tips in mind during the introduction portion of your interview:

- **Be on time** - Show up early and make a good impression. Being late can derail your interview before it starts.
- **Eye contact, firm handshake, and smile** - Company representatives often tell us that they determine people who are not 'fits' for their company within the first 5 minutes of an interview. Make the best first impression you can - it counts! Make sure your attire is sharp and professional, and make sure your body language reflects the type of image you are trying to project. Be confident and personable. Smile. It will help you relax.
- **Build rapport** - Most professional interviewers will immediately attempt to put you at ease in order to find out who you really are. This should assist you in relaxing, but do not forget your setting. Do not get too comfortable or lose your professional bearing, but keep in mind most interviewers select individuals that, above meeting the basic qualifications for a position, they like personally.
- **Start off strong** - Typically, the first question you are asked is some variation of either "tell me about yourself" or "please walk me through your resume." Both of these questions allow you to introduce yourself to the interviewer. An ideal answer will tell your story, make an impact, last 2-3 minutes, and be tailored (using your thesis) for that interview. This question will be your first chance to talk about your background and will set a positive tone for the rest of your interview.

The Next 30 Minutes (The Body)

During the body of your interview, the interviewer will ask you a series of questions for approximately 20-30 minutes, depending on the position, that will focus on your qualifications. Some questions are behavioral (looking for specific examples when you demonstrated a particular behavior) others can be company oriented to get a feel of how much you know about the position and industry. Your answers should highlight your qualifications, personality, and interest in the position they are seeking to fill.

You should keep the following question in the back of your mind during the body of your interview: "Why are they asking me this question?" Any question asked is an attempt to see if you are a good match for the position they are interviewing for. Your responses need to be genuine, practiced and tailored to the job. It is important to make an impact here. Keep the following in mind during the body of your interview:

Have a plan.

You must have a plan before you walk in the door and stay on course! Know what a company is looking for and have three points (strengths/attributes) that you need to emphasize that align with what the company is looking for. Rehearse your answers to maintain concise responses and to avoid rambling. Stick to your plan.

Be sincere.

Be confident and genuine. Avoid clichés. Do not attempt to pass generic textbook answers as your own. Back up your answers with specific, detailed examples from your career. The more substance you can lend to a trait or accomplishment, the more believable and interesting you will be to an interviewer.

Show interest and enthusiasm.

This of course isn't the time to pull out the football game cheers. However, make sure your interest and excitement in the job are apparent. Qualified but disinterested will not get you a second interview. Energy and enthusiasm go a long way. If you are a very even keeled person, verbalize your interest. Tell them you are excited about the job. Would you prefer to hire someone who came across as disinterested or enthusiastic?

Be specific.

Examples will add depth to your answers and make you stand out. Be as specific as possible. Try to include names, places, and time periods in your answers. Remember, everyone says that they are a leader, a communicator, and a problem-solver. Prove it with examples that illustrate your strengths. Vague answers will not suffice while six-minute monologues will lose your audience's interest. Your best bet is to stick with professional examples in your responses unless they request a personal one.

Stay focused.

In a hiring conference setting, after the fourth interview of the day, it is easy to become a victim to question overload. Maintain your concentration; the interviewer will provide indications of the qualities he/she is seeking. A perceptive candidate often picks up clues from the interviewer and tailors answers accordingly. Also, keep track of what is being said. You don't want to be caught asking a question on material that was already covered.

Pay attention to non-verbal signals.

Facial expressions and body language can significantly aid you in determining how the interview is progressing. If an interviewer appears interested (leaning forward, smiling, etc.) expound and give further detail; if you feel like you are losing them (glassy eyes, yawns, crossed arms), wrap it up and put the ball back in their court.

Listen to the questions being asked.

You want to make sure you are answering the question that was asked, not the question you want to answer. Make sure you listen to the question completely. Pause. Then answer the question. Don't feel like you have to answer as quickly as possible. It is much better to take a second to collect your thoughts and give a good answer than it is to recover from a poor answer that you did not give much thought to.

Focus on the opportunity at hand.

In an attempt to calibrate your focus and motivation, interviewers may present you with different potential opportunities within their company. That opportunity may really exist; however, you do not want to talk yourself out of the original position. Inform the interviewer that the other opportunity sounds interesting, but you really would like to pursue the original position. The same ploy is sometimes used when the subject of compensation or location is brought up. The interviewer is normally testing for hidden motivators or requirements that might eliminate your candidacy for the position.

Interview like it's your top choice.

Always put your best foot forward even if the opportunity is not appealing at first glance. Make the company become interested enough in you to bring you out for a secondary interview. It is very hard to determine a company's culture based off one individual and without a site visit. A job description is not enough information to determine if the company is a fit for you (especially if you are not familiar with Corporate America as of yet). There may also be hidden opportunities within a company that better suit your qualifications and desires. Keep an open mind about career options.

Focus on your body language.

Ensure you look the interviewer in the eyes, but not to the point of making the interviewer uncomfortable. Think conversation, not inquisition. Be cognizant of your own body language. Sit straight, lean forward, and avoid distracting gestures.

Never interrupt the interviewer.

This isn't your show, so go with the flow. Let the interviewer conduct the session at his pace. Concentrate on getting in sync with them. However, the best interview is a dialogue. Establish rapport with the interviewer, and work on the smooth exchange of information. Continually self-evaluate. How do you sound? Do you think the interviewer is getting a fair evaluation of your talents based on your responses? Are you cocky or meek? Are you still upbeat and smiling?

Keep it positive.

An interview is not a confession. Everything you say should reflect positively upon you and what you will bring to your employer. You must come across as someone the interviewer will want on his team, not someone who needs redemption.

Relax, relax, relax.

Being a little nervous is natural. However, it should not be noticeable to the interviewer. Be confident in your preparation and your attributes. Practice will make you more confident in your answers.

Wrapping It Up (The Conclusion)

You have just completed answering a series of questions focused on your qualifications, now it is time to wrap up the interview. At this point, an interviewer is going to give you the opportunity to ask some questions of your own. You must have questions. Since questions equal interest in the mind of an interviewer, they are a critical component of your interview. Formulate 3-5 well thought out questions that show that you are:

- Well prepared.
- Show genuine interest in the position.
- Set you up for your close.

Keys to Success

- Do not ask questions that should have been answered in your research (company philosophy, products, general competitors). Check with your Orion Account Executive on job related questions (number of people you would supervise, growth potential, career path).
- You have a limited amount of time to ask questions in an interview; focus on those that fit the 3 criteria above.
- Focus on questions that will assist you in your career decision.
- Avoid questions that will raise red flags, or “what’s in it for me” questions (potential benefits, vacation days, salary, etc.). You do not want to create the impression that you are more interested in benefits than in what you can do for the team.
- Ask sincere questions in which you are genuinely interested in the answer.

Closing the Interview

“The Close” is a term used to describe the process of gaining some form of commitment from the prospective customer. In this case, the interviewer is the customer. By paying attention and asking the appropriate questions, you should uncover the employer’s needs. The needs that you are able to satisfy

(through the use of your talents) become potential benefits to the employer. Focus on those needs during your close.

The importance of the close is more critical during a sales interview than in any other type of interview. In a sales interview, the interviewer will determine how well you can sell his product based on how well you sell yourself. However, it is important that every potential candidate, regardless of the type of job you are seeking, understands the mechanics of the close. You must be able to convey your desire to work for the interviewer's company. We recommend that you always close an interview, no matter what type of position you are interviewing for.

By practicing closing techniques, you will feel more natural and comfortable when you "close." Do not attempt anything in an interview that feels canned or forced. Experiment with different closes and find the one that works best for you. Regardless of your closing technique, a close should consist of three points: Thank the interviewer for their time.

Be genuine. "Thanks for taking the time to interview me today."

Sell yourself.

How hard you sell the interviewer is up to you, but at a minimum, you should tell the interviewer that you believe you are a strong fit for the position and list a couple of qualities that you think are particularly strong: "I think I am a very strong fit for this position. You are looking for a strong leader and communicator, and those are two of my strengths."

Ask for what you want.

After a first interview, you should ask to go on-site and meet the rest of their team. After a final interview, you should ask for an offer. "I am really looking forward to going on-site and meeting the rest of your team. When can we set that up?" or "I am looking forward to receiving an offer."

A great interview is not complete without a good close. Make sure the company knows you are interested as you are leaving the interview. Do not leave the company wondering if you are interested.

Most Common Mistakes

Over the years, we have noted some common mistakes that others have made that can hurt you in the interview process. Remember it is not always the most qualified person who gets the offer; rather, it is often the person who has the best interview. Make sure to avoid the following mistakes.

Lack of enthusiasm.

You must show energy and enthusiasm if you want to be seriously considered for any opportunity. If a company does not see your desire or enthusiasm for a position during an interview, you will not likely be considered further for the position.

Vague answers.

A strong answer is supported by a detailed example. If you do not provide an example or the examples you provide in support of your answers are weak or vague, your answers will not make the impact you need to land the position. An experienced interviewer will typically interpret your lack of solid examples as inadequate professional experience and disqualify you for the position.

Inadequate personality.

Would you hire someone who demonstrated a poor attitude, lack of poise, lack of self-confidence, acted timid, or couldn't complete his or her thoughts? You must come across as a confident, personable individual to make a positive impact on an interviewer.

Lack of goals and objectives.

Companies hire former military officers because they are focused and goal oriented. Know what you want going into an interview. A company will not hire a poorly motivated individual or someone who does not know what he or she wants, acts indecisive, or someone who is not goal oriented.

Lack of interest.

A company simply will not hire someone who shows a lack of interest in the company or someone who is not interested in the type of work offered. Focus on getting your foot in the door. Learn the business and get promoted. Focus on the long-term career opportunities the company offers. Companies typically do not offer executive level positions to individuals without operational experience in their company or industry.

Poor communication skills.

You have to do some self-analysis. Research yourself. Practice interview questions. If you don't practice, you won't be able to communicate as effectively as you will need to in an interview setting. Poor communication or presentation skills typically result from a lack of preparation.

Unrealistic salary demands.

Be realistic. Get your foot in the door and work your way up. The most successful candidates are the candidates that focus on the opportunity and long term growth potential a company offers versus compensation.

Poor personal appearance.

Appearance in an interview is critically important. Dress like a professional. Treat this interview as if you are going to meet your commanding officer for the first time. A poor appearance can doom an interview from the start.

Failure to research the company.

If you cannot tell an interviewer why you are interested in the company or provide some basic information that shows you have done some research, most interviewers will interpret your lack of preparation as a lack of interest. Be a professional and take your job search seriously. Research the company in advance of your interview.

Geographically fixed.

The reality of the job market is that the more flexible you are geographically, the more opportunities you will be able to see. Think hard about what you are open to. Everybody has drivers that influence their search, but don't restrict yourself to the point that you have to settle for a position you are not happy with.

Not asking questions.

Not asking questions is perceived as not being interested. Even with the 5th interviewer of the day, ask them something. Find out what they see as the biggest challenges in the role or ask about what they like about the company. Ask something. Don't say that everyone else answered all your questions.

Failure to close the interview.

Don't let the interviewer wonder if you are interested. Thank them for their time and reiterate your interest again at a minimum. In a sales interview, be sure to ask for the next step or for the offer.

Developing Your Plan

Now that you have an overview of the types of interviews and their typical structure, you can start developing your interview plan. The first place to begin is researching yourself and your career experiences and organizing them. The next step is to take those experiences and expand them using the STAR format. Once you understand the simple structure of the STAR format, you must begin expanding your examples / stories by writing them down. The final step is to prepare by verbalizing these answers. Once you have taken those steps, you should be prepared to interview effectively. The work pages in this next section will help you start to get organized.