

Joey T's
Mini Workshop
on the
Job Search Process

Some questions of a type frequently asked in recent job interviews:

Tell me about yourself. (Have a well-organized one or two minute answer; stick mainly to things relating to studies/career, not “I love puppies,” and generally not personal matters like how death of a loved one affected you.)

In fact, have a good 30-second “elevator speech” that summarizes your career interests and relevant achievements.

What do you know about our company? (In a phone interview a recent grad replied “Not very much,” and the interviewer promptly ended the call. In the Internet era you should visit the company’s web site and at least learn about its business lines and where major facilities are located.)

Why are you interested in this job? [Tell why you are a good fit; be as specific as you can, and show passion for doing the job. Saying “I thought I might give it a try” is likely to take you out of the running – why should they be confident that you are right for the job if you are not even sure?]

Describe a recent decision you made, and how you went about making it.

Describe a specific time in your work history (or other activity) when you

- showed leadership (or took initiative, or went beyond expectations)*
- enjoyed a significant success, and what you attribute the success to*
- suffered a failure (or got negative feedback), and how you reacted*
- had to adapt quickly to new circumstances*
- made a difference in someone else’s life*
- had to deal with a conflict (or with someone who was upset)*
- had to deviate from company policy*
- had to sacrifice quality to get a job done*
- were asked to do something that made you uncomfortable*
- had to handle a problem with someone in a group project*

or just encountered a problem or challenge in general, and tell how you resolved it. Be prepared to give a specific example, and to answer with a “S/TAR” approach (describe Situation or Task you were confronted with, Action you took, Result of your action)

*What are your strengths? Weaknesses? (Stick to studies/career issues)
What would your ideal job be (and why)? What are your short-term and long-term career goals? Where do you see yourself in five years (old question that still pops up)?*

What do you consider your biggest academic achievement, and why?

How would others describe you? (Get feedback from your friends on this.)

What kind of accounting are you interested in, and why (Q to ACC major)?

Analytical questions: More companies seem to be asking questions that require you to think. For example, if they ask you how to estimate number of drug stores in Omaha, the answer they want does not involve looking things up on a web site. Or they ask what type of tree or animal you see yourself as. Here are a few specifics I have heard about.

Example: *How can you time exactly 9 minutes using only a 4-minute and a 7-minute "hourglass" timer? Answer:* Turn both timers over, and when the 4-minute timer runs out turn it immediately over again. When the 7-minute timer runs out turn it back over immediately. Then when the 4-minute timer runs out a second time (8 minutes have passed) the 7-minute timer will have just 1 minute of sand in the bottom chamber; turn it over and when it again runs out after 1 additional minute you will know that 9 minutes have passed.

Example: *You need to cross a river with a fox and two chickens, none of which can swim, in a boat that you must row and that can hold only one rider at a time. If you are not present the fox will eat a chicken. How can you get all three animals safely across? Answer:* Row across with the fox and leave it on bank B. Return alone to bank A to pick up a chicken, and when you return to bank B bring the fox back with you. Leave the fox on bank A and take the second chicken to bank B. Then make a final round trip to pick up the fox.

Example: *You have one can that holds exactly 3 quarts, one can that holds exactly 5 quarts, and plenty of water. How can you measure exactly 4 quarts of water? Answer:* Fill the 5-quart can, pour 3 quarts off into the 3-quart can, and then dump those 3 quarts down the drain. Then empty the remaining 2 quarts from the 5-quart can into the 3-quart can. Again fill the 5-quart can, but then pour off 1 quart to fill the 3-quart can. There will be exactly 4 quarts left in the 5-quart can.

Example: *12 ingots look identical, but 1 is a tiny bit heavier than the other 11. How can you identify the heavy ingot using a balance scale just three times? One answer:* Put 4 ingots in each pan of the scale. If one side weighs more, the heavy ingot is part of that group of 4; if the two sides weigh the same then the heavy ingot is in unweighed group. Put two ingots from the heavy group into each pan; the side that weighs more has the heavy ingot. Then weigh the 2 that remain to see which weighs more.

Questions recruiters have said it is ok for you to ask the interviewer:

What qualifications are you looking for in a candidate? [Then tell how you meet those.]

What is a typical career path in this organization? OR

What do you expect the new hire to accomplish in 3, 6, 12 months?

Can you tell me more about the training program?

What is the typical day like at [name of company]? (Do not ask how many hours people work, or it may look like you do not want to give extra effort.)

What types of employee development activities do you provide?

Do you allow/encourage short-term assignments to let employees gain new skills or experiences?

How do you measure performance? How do you recognize performance? (Don't say "reward" or it may seem that you think only about money.)

Why did you choose to build your career at [name of company]?

How has [recent prominent, relevant event in the news] affected the firm?

[Asking about the process (e.g., time frame for hiring) usually is ok, but they tend to tell you those things.]

[DO NOT ask about pay or vacation until late in the process, preferably after you have received an offer.]

[DO NOT ask if it is easy to make internal moves within the company, or it may appear that you are applying for the job only to get a foot in the door.]

Serious Mistakes – Things NOT to Do:

- Do not meet with company rep (*e.g.*, at career fair) without having researched the company, and the job if possible (asking “what does your company do?” is likely to move you directly to the “no” pile).
- Do not ever show up late for an interview; get there 15 minutes early – “on-time is late,” as one recruiter put it. [However, another recruiter reported finding it “creepy” if the candidate gets there more than a few minutes early. You might split the difference by getting to the site plenty early and then finding a quiet place outside the view of the recruiter’s office to wait until a few minutes before the interview.]
- Do not have spelling or grammatical errors on your resume; they will be seen as a lack of attention to detail when attention to detail is really important. And definitely do not misstate the name of the company on your cover letter.
- Do not send a resume as an attachment named simply “Resume;” name it “Sara Michelson Resume.” Every employer gets tons of resumes – show that you think about and pay attention to details.

Things to Do, If At All Possible:

- Get an internship – it is a 12-week job interview.
- Show enthusiasm & positive attitude during the interview and in any subsequent communication; tell them you want the job.
- Have something unique (work experience, community service, study abroad/other unusual course work) that gives recruiter positive reason to remember you and provides basis for questions/conversation.
- On resume tell “life lessons” you learned in student jobs, don’t devote limited space telling that as a store clerk you “gave correct change.”
- It’s ok to bring letters of recommendation, even writing samples, to an interview or even a career fair (though some firms may decline to take these things at a career fair).
- Send thank-you note to anyone you interviewed with, or who spent serious time talking to you. Some recruiters say e-mail is ok, but don’t do job-related correspondence through unprofessional sounding phone message or e-mail address.

Cover Letters:

A cover letter may or may not be needed in applying for a particular job. Cover letters might best be understood in historical context. Before personal computer age students had to pay serious money to get resumes professionally type-set – but then printing extra copies was cheap. So resumes were kept pretty generic to relate to wide range of possible jobs, with cover letters “filling in the details.” Finance major would apply for jobs in banking, investments, corporate finance all with same resume, but with each application would send cover letter telling how he or she was well suited to the position the employer sought to fill.

If a cover letter is requested, then of course you should provide one. But today your own printer will produce a resume just as professional as the old type-set models, so you can easily go in and custom-fit your resume, conforming the stated objective and the ordering of your achievements to fit the job you are applying for. Cover letter still might serve to provide added useful information (one recruiter said it is viewed as a brief writing sample), but in some cases might end up being redundant (definitely do not just repeat what resume says). •

Quick Resume Points:

Recruiters say, almost without exception, that a college student resume should be no longer than one page. If resume is longer than a page it will look like you want them to read about every little thing you ever have done; keeping things to one page shows that you know how to be selective and highlight what is most important.

They also are fairly consistent in saying that high school achievements do not belong on the college resume. It is seen as dweeby to list your high school diploma, for example. My take is that there might be some limited cases in which high school matters are worth including – for example, community service activities that you started during high school years and still work with (shows continuity and commitment).

Saying “References available on request” is a meaningless statement, a waste of space – if they ask for references and you don’t provide them, you are immediately out of consideration anyway, right?

Work Experience on Your Resume:

Joey T's Take

If you have held typical “student” type jobs during your college and high school years, the work section of your resume should highlight “life lessons” learned, skills that would apply in the professional world, and special achievements, rather than specific tasks you performed.

So ask yourself: what do I know from holding this job that other people may not know? But keep it completely true; don't exaggerate anything!!
(*Never say anything on your resume unless you can back it up.*)

Emily Johnson: Work Experience

Dave's Dogs and Burgers, Teutopolis, IL May 2016 – Present

- Did part-time and seasonal work at fast food restaurant
- ~~Worked the counter and drive through window and did clean up~~
- ~~Filled napkin trays~~
- ~~Filled ketchup dispensers~~
- ~~Gave customers their food orders~~
- Learned the importance of providing quality products
- Learned to work in a team environment
- Gained leadership experience as crew chief for busy lunch shift in Summer 2019

Lori's Ladies' Wear, Newton, IL April 2014 – May 2016

- Clerked on sales floor and in storage room
- ~~Greeted customers in a warm and friendly manner~~
- ~~Put clothes neatly on hangers~~
- ~~Gave customers correct change~~
- Learned basic work responsibilities in this first job
- Learned the importance of customer service
- Improved inventory control by reorganizing storage room

Julius Davidson: Work Experience

Darden Yard & Garden, Hardin, IL

April 2011 – Present

- Handled a range of tasks for local hardware and seed store
- ~~Stocked shelves~~
- ~~Waited on customers~~
- ~~Gave correct change~~
- Learned the importance of customer service
- Learned to work in a team environment
- Worked effectively under time pressure in busy holiday periods
- Gained inventory management experience through helping store manager place orders with hardware companies
- Earned steady promotions from sweeping floors to training new sales clerks over a nine-year period of part-time and seasonal work

Other points to emphasize:

Lifeguards (and camp counselors, even baby sitters) hold serious responsibility for other people's safety.

Working for your parents' business (including/especially farms) is a good thing; stress that as a family member you gained insights into a wide variety of business issues – might include personnel, financial, marketing and customer service, safety, laws/regulations. And it's hard work!!

Working while you are in school helps develop time-management skills.

Military experience is great: stress leadership, teamwork, service, sacrifice, working under difficult conditions (promotions earned/rank held and number of people supervised are good to talk about). Don't refer to weapons/weapons systems you worked with unless it's directly relevant to the job.

Be careful saying that you have "excellent analytical (communication, teamwork, *etc.*) skills" – let the facts (*e.g.*, high GPA, awards earned) or references say it for you. Talk in terms of interests/things you enjoy doing.

GPA on Your Resume if Overall GPA is Not Great: Joey T's Take

If you do not show a grade point average on your resume, any reader is going to assume that your GPA is not good. What to do? Possibilities.

Remember: every statement on your resume must be both 1) factually correct and 2) sufficiently reasonable that you can defend it in a discussion with a recruiter.

- 1) Leave GPA unstated – but your resume will likely go right to many recruiters' "no" pile (who would fail to state GPA if it is favorable??).
- 2) Show the low overall GPA, and try to explain it.

GPA 2.62 (paid for 100% of my own education costs by working 30 + hours every week throughout college)

- 3) Compute a more limited GPA that is worth showing (be sure it is sensibly conceived, honestly computed, and **clearly labeled**).

GPA in Business Course Work: 3.48

Recall the need to be "factual" and "reasonable." If you say it is based on "business" courses you had better compute based on all COB classes (might have some leeway in including/omitting courses like Econ 101/102 or English 145 that are non-COB but specifically required for any ISU business degree). Or if you say "GPA in Finance Course Work: 4.0" you will end up looking silly if you have had only one Finance course.

The resume reader who sees this more limited GPA knows it is higher than your not-so-good overall GPA, and may put you on the "no" pile. But showing a **clearly labeled** limited GPA is an honest attempt to say, "I did not excel in all courses, but did well in areas relating to this job." The recruiter can then decide if the candidate is worth a further look.

If you have transferred in hours (a few or a lot), you could compute a combined GPA and **clearly label** as "GPA in All College Course Work."

Send Thank You Note After Interview!!

Jessica Liebman, Managing Editor of *Business Insider*, says #1 mistake people make in interview process is not sending thank-you note afterwards. She says recruiter who does not get thank-you note assumes candidate does not want job or is disorganized; either way recruiter will forget about them.

Per Liebman, thank-you correspondence should be brief but say:

- Thank you for meeting (or talking) with me.
- I really want this job.
- Here are reasons why I feel I am a good fit.

Liebman suggests e-mail rather than handwritten thank-you note:

- Can e-mail later the day of your interview to show just how eager you are. Getting back within 24 hours shows interest and good form.
- E-mail gives interviewer easy way to reply back to you (and keep your e-mail address handy). Lets them ask follow-up question and keep discussion going. Interviewer is less likely to hand-write back to you, especially since something snail-mailed may feel more “final.”
- E-mail can be tailored to the tone of the interview: as casual or formal as seems appropriate. Handwritten notes can feel unduly formal.
- Snail-mailed note might get lost/misdirected, never get to interviewer.
- Handwritten note can seem old-fashioned, esp. for high-tech job.

Joey T's take: consider doing both?

Hand-written thank-you's are a lost art. A hand-written note – if you have good handwriting – will help you stand out as a candidate. Maybe consider e-mailing shortly after interview and also quickly sending a hand-written note (don't say the exact same thing in both)?

Internships – Do One If You Can!

Benefits of an Internship

1. Learn more about (and confirm) field you think you want to work in
2. Meet and network with people who can give advice, recommend you
3. Great substantive resume builder – instills knowledge and confidence, shows commitment to field, gives great things to talk about in interviews

Internship Priority Ranking

1. Learn a lot (don't give that up for 2 – 4 below, free Cubs tickets, *etc.*)
2. Work with people who will take a personal interest in your future
3. Be with an organization that has a history of hiring interns
4. Get paid – lowest priority concern

The Beauty of Unpaid Internships

1. Focus is on the learning, not company's "getting their money's worth"
2. Availability not budget-driven; sometimes easy and quick to arrange
3. Less need to compete with others; less concern over grades/experience
4. Unpaid should be part-time; should also still be able to hold paying job
5. Looks great on resume; shows commitment
6. University has more power to intervene if problems arise in an unpaid than in a paid internship (if you are getting course credit)