



INTERVIEWING

At a recent BAC lecture, a guest speaker who is the head of human resources at a major Boston-based design firm noted, "The cover letter and resume are what get you an interview. The interview is what gets you a job." Expanding on the work of the cover letter and resume, the job interview represents the opportunity to further match your experience and skill set with the needs of the firm, while offering an in-person view of your strong work ethic, willingness to learn, and engaging personality. The prospect of doing all this in one 30 or 60 minute meeting can be daunting, but with diligent research and preparation ahead of time and energy and enthusiasm for the opportunity of the table, you can nail that next job interview. Here's how.

Before the interview, it is an absolute MUST that you thoroughly research the firm ahead of time. What is the firm's history? What are its goals? What is the scope of work they do? Who are the firm's clients? What specific projects have they done? Are there any that you can visit in person? Who are some key staff? How many employees are there? Have they received any awards or been published in any design journals recently? These are all things you'll need to know to speak intelligently and comfortably during an interview. Beforehand, write answers to these questions and take them with you to the interview.

Also, before the interview, print and bring...

- a detailed job description of the position you'll be interviewing for.
- accurate directions to the office. *Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early... no more, no less.*
- extra copies of your cover letter, resume, references, and portfolio.
- the name(s) and title(s) of the people who you'll be interviewed by, if possible.

Prepare for tough questions ahead of time. Before the interview, write answers to the following:

- Questions common to any interview:
 - "What can you tell me about yourself?"
 - "Why do you want to work here?"
 - "What are your strengths and weaknesses?"
 - "Do you work better individually or as part of a team?"
 - "Describe a recent problem or conflict and how you were able to resolve it."
 - "Why did you leave your last job?"
- Questions common to a BAC/design interview:
 - "Why do you want to become an architect/interior designer/landscape architect/etc.?"
 - "Tell me about your skills working with CAD, Photoshop, and/or other software."
 - "How long are you planning to stay with us? Does the BAC encourage students to move around?"
 - "How do you envision balancing work and school?"
 - "Do you work well under pressure?... when faced with tight deadlines?"
 - "How long do you plan to be in this position?"
 - For some: "This is an entry-level job. How do you feel about taking a job that is a step back?"

With each answer, try to strengthen the match between your skills and experience with the position, citing real-life examples from your past, while turning any potential negatives into positives. If you're having trouble answering any of these questions, do not hesitate to meet with someone in the Practice Department or Learning Resource Center (contact info above). Also, practice presenting your portfolio so the explanations of your work are clear and thoughtful. And practice presenting your portfolio upside-down, as though you're sitting across the table from the interviewer. Mock interviews are great for this!

Interview attire:

- Women: business suit (pant or skirt), shirt/blouse, dress shoes (not high heels), briefcase-style bag.
- Men: business suit, collared shirt (fully-buttoned), professional tie, dress shoes, briefcase-style bag.
- Both: all clothing is clean, pressed, and well fitting; hair is groomed and out of your face; use little or no cologne/perfume (some people are intolerant); limited, appropriate jewelry; and do not smoke before going in.

Appearance matters. If you look professional, you'll feel professional.

Your interview starts when you walk in the building's lobby. Be polite to everyone you encounter: security guards, receptionists, fellow elevator passengers, etc. You never know who might be your interviewer, or who might be asked for a report on your conduct. Also, once inside, no gum-chewing or coffee cups, and turn your cell phone completely off (not just silent/vibrate).

Body language is an essential part of the interview. Stand/sit up straight. Shake hands firmly, but don't crush. Make eye contact. Smile. Make simple hand gestures. Turn nervousness into excitement for the opportunity. Be positive, enthusiastic, and engaging with your interviewer(s). Also, very important: *take notes during your interview!*

5 Rules for Interviewing with Authority

1. Be concise with your words; avoid unprofessional language such as "like," "um," "y'know," "you guys."
2. Provide specific, real-life examples when discussing your skills and experience.
3. Be honest. Cast yourself in the best light, but don't lie.
4. Turn potential negatives into positives. For example, when asked, "What's your greatest weakness?" talk about a previous job/responsibility that relied on your "extraordinarily high level of attention to detail."
5. Make a match between you and the firm/position.

A good interview is a dialogue. You are there just as much to learn about the firm (beyond what's available on their website) as they are to learn about you (beyond what's on your resume). Prepare and ask great questions about the firm, position, and/or person interviewing you. Almost every interview concludes with the interviewer(s) asking, "Do you have any questions for me/us?" Your response must ALWAYS be, "Yes..." followed by the amazingly-thoughtful question (or two) you prepared prior to the interview.

Please remember, though they rarely come up during a job interview, topics such as race, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, age, national origin, marital status, or family matters are off-limits and/or illegal. If any of these topics do come up, re-direct the conversation back to the position and your skills and experience, and after the interview please contact the BAC Practice Department.

After the interview, within 12 to 24 hours, write a professional thank you note to each of your interviewers. Email is most common, hand-written notes are a nice touch. It is considered professional courtesy to follow up on the interview with a phone call within 3-5 business days. Thank the interviewer (again) for their time and consideration, and ask if there have been any developments in the process of filling the position. If nothing comes of the opportunity, move on. Most BAC student job searches involve several months of persistent, hard work.