

U.S. Job Interview Resources for International Trainees

NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education

Everyone needs to learn how to approach interviews. It's not a skill that we're born with. Even the most outgoing person can benefit from pointers on how to effectively prepare for interviews to highlight his or her strengths. International trainees less familiar with U.S. culture and the interview process can also learn some key points of U.S. culture and interview practice that will help them present themselves in the most positive way possible.

Resources for Interview Preparation

“Improving Spoken English” Seminar	<i>OITE “Improving Spoken English” seminar in Bethesda on June 5th from 1-3pm in the Building 50 auditorium. Please register in advance at http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/ or e-mail goldje@mail.nih.gov for registration link. After the seminar, there will be the opportunity to sign up for practice in small groups.</i>
“Interviewing Outside the Ivory Tower”	<i>For a videocast on interviewing outside academia, go to OITE Web site at http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/documents/ and search for “Interviewing Outside the Ivory Tower.”</i>
Academic job interviewing	<i>For a videocast on academic job interviewing, go to OITE Web site at http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/documents/ and search for “job interviews.”</i>
Business etiquette guidelines	<i>For a videocast on business etiquette, go to OITE Web site at http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/documents/ and search for “business etiquette.”</i>
Interviewing and etiquette	<i>For a videocast on interviewing etiquette, go to OITE Web site at http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/documents/ and search for “Interviewing Etiquette and Skills.”</i>
Online dictionary with audio	<i>http://www.merriam-webster.com. Dictionary with audio pronunciations. Includes medical terms. (medical terms only have audio sometimes)</i>
Pronunciation guidance (American English)	<i>http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/english/frameset.html. American phonetics with both audio and visual component: shows inside (animation) and outside of mouth (video) to help speaker practice key sounds.</i>
U.S. customs and etiquette guidelines	<i>http://www.emilypost.com/</i>
U.S. table manners and other related tips	<i>http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Kung-TableManners.html</i>

Prepared by the Office of Human Resources, NIH

Primary Source: Society of Human Resources Management (www.shrm.org)

Preparation

The key to successful interviewing is effective preparation. In order to convince a hiring committee that you're the best person for the job, it is critical that you be prepared to talk about yourself and your interest in the position.

Some Ideas for Preparation before the Interview:

- Practice self-advocacy and learn how to tell others about your strengths.
- Do your research on the company.
- Think about what your Internet persona looks like. Clean it up, if necessary.
- Pay attention to written communication. When in doubt, err on the formal side.
- Practice (out loud!). Call the OITE to arrange a practice interview, once you've prepared.
- Continue to improve oral communication.
- Decide on appropriate business attire. Traditional business dress for men is a business suit, dress shirt, and a tie. Make sure your socks match...no white socks! For women, suits with a skirt or pants are appropriate. Pantyhose/stockings are also necessary for traditional business attire. Both men and women should wear closed-toe, closed heel shoes.

Questions you might ask employers either during or at the end of the interview:

1. Can you describe the primary responsibilities of this position?
2. What does a typical day look like?
3. What is the largest single problem facing your staff (department) right now?
4. May I talk with the last person who held this position?
5. What is the usual promotional time frame?
6. What do you like best about your job/this organization?
7. Has there been much turnover in this area?
8. How is performance evaluated?
9. What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
10. What is the management style of the person who will serve as my supervisor?
11. Is there a lot of team/project work?
12. What is life like in this city/town?
13. What are the next steps? When should I expect to hear from you?

What the Interviewer CAN and CANNOT legally ask you

hr.od.nih.gov/employment/Interview/DosandDonts.doc

Please note: In order to avoid discrimination, employers are prohibited from asking questions about certain matters (below). It's not always practical or prudent, however, to tell a prospective employer that he or she has asked an illegal question. However, if he or she does ask an inappropriate question, it may give you some insight into the work culture. You may have a difficult choice to make about whether or not the workplace is appropriate for you. Feel free to schedule an appointment with a career counselor at the OITE to discuss these kinds of questions. To schedule an appointment, please contact Kathryn Foisie at foisiek@od.nih.gov or 301.594.9339.

Category	Questions Interviewers May Ask	Questions Interviewers Cannot Legally Ask
Sex and Family Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If applicant has any relatives already employed by the organization—only relevant if within the chain of command of job at hand or in selecting process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex of applicant • Number of children/pregnancy status • Marital status • Spouse's occupation • Child care arrangements • Health care coverage through spouse • Sexual orientation of applicant
Race		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicant's race or color of skin • Photo to be affixed to application form
National Origin or Ancestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to speak/write English fluently (if job related) • Other languages spoken (if job related) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic association of a surname • Birthplace of applicant or applicant's parents • Nationality, lineage, national origin • Nationality of applicant's spouse • Whether applicant is citizen of another country • Applicant's native tongue/English proficiency • Maiden name (of married woman)
Religion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious affiliation/availability for weekend work • Religious holidays observed
Age		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of birth • Date of high school graduation • Age
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether an applicant can perform the essential job related functions, and how, if appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If applicant has a disability (even if the impairment is obvious) • Nature or severity of a disability • Whether applicant has ever filed a worker's compensation claim • Recent or past surgeries and dates • Past medical problems
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convictions if job related • Academic, vocational, or professional schooling • Training received in the military • Membership in any trade or professional association • Job references—All of these areas should be provided as part of the application; only certain job-related follow-up questions would be appropriate in the interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and kinds of arrests • Political affiliation of the applicant • Physical characteristics (i.e. height, weight, strength, etc.) – except if a bona fide occupational qualification • Veteran status, discharge status, branch of service contact in case of emergency (at application or interview stage) • Bankruptcy and credit affairs

DOs and DON'Ts

INTERVIEW DOS	INTERVIEW DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research the department before the interview• Review sample questions and practice your answers• Schedule a mock interview with OITE• Bring extra CVs/resumes to the interview• Dress professionally• Bring a list of questions you have for the interviewers• Send follow-up thank-you letter• When discussing offers and salary, talk in terms of a range, not a single figure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrive late!• Ask about salary details (during the initial interview—later is OK)• Ask about how many vacation days you will have as an employee (you can ask human resources later)• Ask about a position for your partner• Argue with the interviewer• Volunteer negative information about yourself or current/previous employers• Continue to interview for other jobs after you have accepted a position

Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) Contact Information

OITE home page:

<http://www.training.nih.gov/>

Career Advancement Toolkit online:

<http://www.training.nih.gov/trainees/toolkit/>

To schedule an appointment with an OITE career counselor:

e-mail Kathryn Foisie at foisiek@mail.nih.gov

Questions for Julie Gold, Leadership and Professional Development Coach:

goldje@mail.nih.gov