

*David F. Miller Center for*  
***Retailing***  
Education & Research  

---

Developing Tomorrow's Retail Leaders

*Presents*

**HOW  
TO  
INTERVIEW**

**UF** | Warrington  
College of Business  
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

## I. The Job Interview -- Be Ready!

Securing a job in today's job market is highly competitive. Employers are seeking the best qualified candidates for their limited number of openings. But being the best qualified is not enough. You must also have the skills and ability to communicate effectively with the employer.

The job interview is the means by which you, the job applicant, and the employer come together to determine common interests. Outside of special events and employer presentations it is also (usually) the first time you come into direct contact with each other. An employer has two basic aims in the interview: to get the right person for the job and to get a person who can contribute something to the organization's goals. Consequently, there is no "tomorrow." Either you convince the employer that you have the potential and abilities required of the job and are the best selection - or you do not.

The information presented herein is designed to help you in preparing for on-campus interviewing for a career in retailing. Because the on-campus interview last 20-30 minutes, as opposed to off-campus interviews, a premium is placed on your ability to effectively communicate. Or, stated another way, "YOU WILL NOT GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION."

## II. Preparing For a Job Interview

- A. The secret to a successful job interview is a sound presentation. You must prepare for the interviews with the goal of being recommended by the recruiter for a second interview off-campus. Your background, i.e., education, work experiences, extra-curricular activities and interests alone WILL NOT guarantee you success. You must be able to express your ideas about these subjects to the interviewer and be knowledgeable to the interviewer's company. In short, the key is preparation - so begin with yourself - SELF ASSESSMENT.

Analyze:	your strengths	career interests
	weaknesses	personal goals
	background	work experiences
	academic performance	special skills

- B. Let's examine this from another perspective. Think of the interview as a classroom situation where you are the "professor" and the recruiter is the "student". Prepare as you would in developing a lesson plan or for an important class presentation.

### 1. Career Objectives

- Clearly define realistic objectives to a career in retailing.
- Be prepared to relate your objectives to a specific starting position based on company knowledge.

2. Educational Background

- a. Outline and organize your education.
- b. Select the most relevant information.
- c. Be prepared to relate your education as preparation for a career in retailing.

3. Work Experience

- a. Outline and organize your work experiences.
- b. Select relevant job information.
- c. Be prepared to discuss specific work tasks and the skills you developed which relate to the retail industry.
- d. Be prepared to relate your work experience as preparation for an entry-level position.

4. Abilities and Skills

- a. Review abilities and skills.
- b. Be prepared to relate SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF YOUR ABILITIES AND SKILLS. For example, when asked, “describe a situation in which you received a set of instructions with which you disagreed”, be able to follow up with a specific situation and specific skills that you used to remedy the problem in a positive manner.

5. Knowledge of Employer

- a. Be prepared to demonstrate your knowledge of employer. Read about the company at the Center for Retailing
- b. Be prepared to give reasons for your interest in the field of retailing and the company you are interviewing with.
- c. Be able to relate your objectives to employer.
- d. Develop questions to give you the information you need to make decision.

C. Keep in mind that recruiters have been trained to ask questions designed to reveal both your strengths and weaknesses. If you do your own self-assessment, you can concentrate on your strengths.

D. The two cardinal rules dealing with interview preparation are:

- 1. Be Prepared.
- 2. Be Yourself.

E. To meet these two basic needs you should know what you want to do, all you can about the company, and the interview structure. Let’s now look at each of these in more detail.

- 1. KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT simply means “be goal oriented.” You should have some ideas about:

- a. Kind of entry level job you want and why.
  - b. Type of training program desired.
  - c. Level of responsibility you want.
  - d. Kind of work environment you want.
  - e. Job location desired.
  - f. Salary expectation.
  - g. Advancement opportunities, etc.....
  - h. How many hours per week you are prepared to work.
2. **KNOW THE EMPLOYER.** Preparation for a retail interview should also involve the prospective employer.
- a. Who are they?
  - b. What types of job(s) do they have?
  - c. What kind of products do they carry? (i.e., hard lines, soft lines, specialty, etc.)
  - d. What kind of training program do they have?
  - e. How long is the training program?
  - f. What is the career path within the company?
  - g. What is the advancement potential?

Information about most retail employers can be found in the Career Resource Center Library located in the Reitz Union. Additional information may be obtained at the Center for Retailing, the Career Expo, Retail Workshops, and the Retail Management Seminar course.

3. **KNOWING JOB INTERVIEW STRUCTURE** insures that you will know “what happens next.” Possessing a working knowledge of the interview structure is the key to being able to relax and be at your best in an otherwise stressful situation.

There are various types of interviews, ranging from the seemingly casual to the highly structured. The course the interview takes, to a large extent, depends on the personality and philosophy of the company and the interviewer.

There are a number of factors that influence the content and structure of an interview:

- a. The personality of the interviewer.
- b. Your personality.
- c. Time limitations.
- d. The physical setting of the interview.

There are certain patterns or commonalities that seem to emerge in almost every interview. These are:

- a. A brief introduction - to establish rapport.

- b. A discussion of your background.
  - c. A discussion of your career objectives and how they fit into what the employer is looking for.
  - d. An opportunity for you to ask questions of the interviewer about the company.
  - e. The close.
- F. Your ability to market the product, “YOU,” is in direct proportion to your level of preparation. If you aren’t prepared, your interview is probably doomed to failure. Any reasonably good interviewer can immediately spot an ill prepared job applicant. This should not, and certainly need not, happen to you.

### III. YOUR INTERVIEW CONDUCT

- A. The purpose of the interview is to exchange information, between you and the interviewer, so that a preliminary decision can be made as to whether you are, or are not, the person best qualified for the job. This decision hinges on what you say and how you act during the interview. In this regard, good advice to remember is:
1. First impressions are important - arrive on time. Try to find out the interviewer’s name prior to the interview. Avoid first name usage unless given permission to do so by the interviewer. Always offer a good firm handshake; this is an indication of confidence. Do not take a seat until the interviewer sits or unless otherwise offered. While being seated is an excellent opportunity to offer your resume to the interviewer.
  2. Act natural and be yourself - don’t try to “role play.” Don’t enter into any interview using a fabricated personality. You probably WILL NOT be able to fool the interviewer anyway.
  3. Attitude is important. Be pleasant and easy to talk to. Be enthusiastic and keep your voice modulated. Take an opportunity to tell the interviewer about your goals and interest in retailing.
  4. Be completely honest. Misrepresentations are usually an attempt to hide some problem. If it’s a matter of being unable to answer a question - say so. Don’t bluff.
  5. Be conscious of your personal grooming. In regard to dress, your own good taste is your best guide. As a general rule dress for the occupation for which you are interviewing. A suit is usually expected for men. A dress or suit is acceptable for women. In the retailing industry you do not have to wear only dark colors such as navy blue, gray, etc. Again, the key is to dress for the occupation. When in doubt, conservative dress is appropriate. Women should use cosmetics sparingly and have a neat hair style. Males should also pay attention to

fingernails, shaves, and haircuts. Remember you are looking for a job - not going to a party.

6. It goes without saying that you should not smoke or chew gum. You will have enough to keep you busy during your 30-minute interview.
7. During the entire job interview always keep your primary objective foremost in your mind. When answering questions you should always give examples as they relate to the position you are after.
8. At the end of your interview express your interest in the company and thank the interviewer by name for his or her time. Be sure you know also what the next step is in the interviewing process. Exit your interview as gracefully as you entered. Within the next few days write a follow-up thank you letter to again express your interest in the company.

#### IV. WHAT THE INTERVIEWER LOOKS FOR DURING AN INTERVIEW

- A. The interviewer must, based upon his or her inquiry and your response, DETERMINE IF YOU - among all the candidates - ARE THE BEST PERSON FOR THE JOB.
- B. The interviewer makes a value judgement concerning you as a probable employee with the company. This judgement is based upon a number of factors called PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS:
  1. PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS - An interviewer relies heavily on the first impression you project. The reason for this is the ability of a person to make a good first impression in business is a definite asset to a company. During the interview you will be evaluated on such personal traits as:
    - a. Appearance
    - b. Eye contact
    - c. Enthusiasm
    - d. Energy level
    - e. Maturity
    - f. Dependability
    - g. Confidence
    - h. Initiative
    - I. Interest
    - j. Ability to communicate
  2. JOB INTERESTS AND CAREER GOALS - An important point is finding out exactly what you want and why you want it. For example, you will probably be asked the question as to why you are interested in a career in retailing. A bad answer would be that you like clothes and shopping in general. A good answer is that

retailing is always changing, is a challenge, and that you like to work with all kinds of merchandise and people. Retail has the opportunity to plan for constant change in styles and trends. It offers an opportunity to take on responsibility and make a difference. In addition, the interviewer will investigate factors relating to your:

- a. Aptitudes and abilities
- b. Adaptability
- c. Initiative
- d. Willingness to work and learn

3. **JOB QUALIFICATIONS** - Your basic qualifications for the job, of course, are of paramount importance. No matter how great a person you are, the final decision in your case will be made based on how you present your qualifications relating to :

- a. Level and appropriateness of academic training
- b. Grades
- c. Leadership activities
- d. Work experiences

C. Remember, the interview is a two-way street. Be prepared to make something happen. It is your responsibility to insure that the interviewer gets the information needed to make a decision in your favor. Don't try to monopolize the conversation. Listen to the interviewer and answer his or her questions. Again, it is best to back-up your answers with specific examples.

## V. PARTS OF A RETAIL JOB INTERVIEW

A. The format of a job interview is the created by the interviewer. Some interviewers will use a check-sheet approach. This means that each student will receive the same questions, and the interviewer will write down each answer. Other interviewers will ask different questions based on how each student presents himself in the interview.

- B. In spite of these influences, the basic structure of a job interview as mentioned before is quite standard. A typical interview has the following five points:

- Introduction - establish rapport.
- Background - Yours! The what, why, where, and when.
- Discussion - Matching needs, yours and the employer's.
- Opportunity to ask questions.
- Close - final comments and what the next step is in the interview process.

## 1. THE INTRODUCTION

- a. This is where the interviewer notes his or her first impression of you, including: your appearance, manner, energy, enthusiasm, and reflectiveness.
- b. The key is to be yourself. The interviewer will set the tone of the interview with small talk or other gestures. Remember, the evaluation starts the moment you enter the room. The way you look, shake hands, sit and talk all play a major part in the initial impressions you make.

## 2. THE BACKGROUND

- a. This is where the employer determines your basic qualifications for the job. They will be trying to determine if you meet or exceed the job requirements needed for a career in retailing.

While you are listening and responding to questions by the interviewer, he or she will note how you handle yourself and evaluate your qualifications and suitability for employment. The initial impression you made will be revised or confirmed during this time.

- b. Some questions you may encounter include:

- (1) Why are you interested in the company?
- (2) Why and when did you decide on a career in retailing?
- (3) What do you know about the company?
- (4) How did you become interested in the company? (Looking for professional response).
- (5) Rank order two other retailers you are interested in and tell why.
- (6) Tell me about yourself.
- (7) Tell me about your extra-curricular activities.
- (8) What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- (9) Do you have a geographic preference? Why?
- (10) Have you worked in retailing before? If you haven't, why?
- (11) What in your opinion are the personal characteristics necessary for success in a retail career?

- (12) What can you do for the company?
- (13) What other companies will you be interviewing with? (Note: It is best to tell the interviewer if you are interviewing with other companies. However, only state companies that are in the retail industry.)
- (14) How did you go about choosing a college?
- (15) Give me an example of you persuading others.
- (16) Tell me about a difficult problem you have faced and how you handled the situation.
- (17) Give an example of a challenge you had to deal with this year. (Were you under pressure? What was the outcome?)

c. The interviewer also evaluates your ability to communicate in a clear and logical manner. He or she is also seeking clues by which to measure and evaluate your:

- (1) Self-confidence
- (2) Ability to relate to others
- (3) Level of motivation
- (4) Interest span
- (5) Personal values

d. Don't "short change" yourself when discussing work experiences. All of your positions are important. This includes part-time, full-time, holiday work (especially work for retailers), internships, and volunteer work.

e. Evaluate your work experiences in terms of attributes and skills you expect to bring into your new career. Remember, employers want employees that are:

- (1) Self-starters
- (2) Self-motivators
- (3) Not afraid to work

### 3. THE DISCUSSION

a. The discussion is the critical part of the interview. It is here that the interviewer tries to match your qualifications and career interests with the job opportunities and/or training programs available within the company.

- b. Having read the company literature, viewed company videos, attended any company presentations, or spoken to different representatives at Career Expo, you should have a good idea of what a career in retailing encompasses. This is your opportunity to enter into a constructive dialogue as to how you can fit into (and be profitable for) the company - **SELL YOUR PRODUCT (YOURSELF)**.
  - c. It is here that you want to show the interviewer by example that you have the following traits which are necessary in order to have a successful career in retailing:
    - 1. Energy & Enthusiasm - the ability to handle the stress of the fast-paced demanding job associated with the retail business.
    - 2. Problem Solving - the ability to analyze facts and dates for planning, managing, and controlling.
    - 3. Creativity - the ability to merchandise creatively and be first in coming trends.
    - 4. Confidence - the ability to take action, seize opportunities, and make quick, confident decisions necessary in the ever-changing world of retailing.
    - 5. Leadership - the ability to take the initiative, helping everyone work together as a team in order for the business to run smoothly.
    - 6. Courage (risk-factor) - the ability to take calculated risks and try something new before someone else does.
  - d. There are several items that you should not bring up during the on-campus interview. These are salary, location, and company benefits. However, if the interviewer brings them up, you should be able to discuss them. Retail salary information is available in the Career Resource Center.
  - e. The discussion phase is the last chance for you to point out any important qualifications that the employer may have left out or passed over lightly. **DON'T BE AFRAID TO POINT THEM OUT.**
4. **OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS**
- a. Depending on the style of the interview, you will have an opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer at some point. As a general rule, you should not ask questions where the answers have already been made available through company literature. It is important that you have some very solid questions to ask the interviewer. This will give a good impression concerning your interest and that you are evaluating the company, as well as the company evaluating you.
  - b. Examples of questions you might wish to discuss include:

- (1) What would a typical day be like once the training program has been completed?
- (2) (If not covered) How long is your training program?
- (3) What are the duties and responsibilities of a department manager (or your first position) after training?
- (4) How long have you been in the retail field? What has your career path been like?
- (5) What do you like best about being in the retail business? The least?
- (6) What kinds of advancement opportunities are available within the company?
- (7) Can you advance at your own pace?
- (8) How often are performance evaluations given? What are they based on?
- (9) What is the growth outlook for the company?

## 5. THE CLOSE

- a. This is the interview wrap-up. If the interviewer is really interested in you, you might get a last minute “selling job” on the company. Sometimes you could even be told the company would like to have you come to their location for further interviews.
- b. You should be told when and how you will hear from the company concerning further interest or ending the interview process.
- c. Remember to write a follow-up letter to the interviewer withing two days after the interview. This letter should include expressing interest in the company and thanking the interviewer for his/her time. This is also a chance for you to include any important information regarding your qualifications which you failed to point out during the on-campus interview.
- d. Before you leave, tell the employer you are interested in the company and job discussed. Many students just show up for the interview and never tell the interviewer they are interested in the job at the close of the interview.

## VI. REASON FOR REJECTIONS

- A. If you do poorly in a job interview and don't receive further consideration, it could be because of one or more of these common reasons:
  1. Insufficient career direction.
  2. Poor personal appearance.
  3. Inability to express self clearly.
  4. Lack of career planning.
  5. Lack of interest and enthusiasm.

6. Make excuses and are evasive in answering questions.
7. Lack of self confidence; poor eye contact.
8. Failure to participate in extra curricular activities.
9. Unwilling to relocate.
10. Asks questions which are answered in company literature.
11. Not really interested in retailing as a career.
12. Lack of knowledge about what the retail industry is all about.
13. Talks too much or too little.
14. Late for interview.
15. Poor scholastic record.

## VII CONCLUSIONS

THE XYZ DEPARTMENT STORES COMPANY  
TARGETED SELECTION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ College/University: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Best Time to Reach: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Division: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Overall GPA: \_\_\_\_\_ Out of \_\_\_\_\_

**OPENING**

- \*Greet Applicant: Give name, position and state that you represent XYZ Department Stores Company.
- \*Explain Format: Will be asked for specific behavioral examples. Will last approximately 30 minutes. Will be taking notes. Will provide applicant opportunity to ask questions.

**DIMENSIONAL QUESTIONS**

**NOTES**

**BACKGROUND REVIEW**

SITUATION    ACTION    RESULT

\*How did you become aware of XYZ?  
 (Check as many as appropriate)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Open house/resume day  | Mentioned by:                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper Ad           | <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personalized letter    | <input type="checkbox"/> Placement office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Interview briefing | <input type="checkbox"/> Other students   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General reputation     | <input type="checkbox"/> Alumni currently |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class presentation     | employed by                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shop at your store     |   |

\*Why did you choose your major? How does it relate to your career goals?

**JOB MOTIVATION**

\*Describe a situation that you found frustrating?  
 What was the cause and how did you deal with it?

\*Give me an example of when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.

---

**DIMENSIONAL QUESTIONS** **NOTES**

---

**DECISION MAKING** SITUATION   ACTION   RESULT

\*Describe a situation in which you received a procedure or set of instructions with which you disagreed. How did you handle it?

\*In your last job, which decisions did you typically make? Which did you refer to a superior?

---

**DIMENSIONAL QUESTIONS** **NOTES**

---

**STRESS TOLERANCE** SITUATION   ACTION   RESULT

\*Give an example of a task that you thought would go on forever. How did you deal with it? Result.

\*When have you been under the most pressure?

\*Describe a situation when someone has lost their temper or become irritated with you.

---

**INTERVIEW CLOSE**

\*Review notes.

\*Ask any additional questions to complete notes.

\*give applicant opportunity to ask questions.

\*Explain that, at the conclusion of our first interviews, we will be in contact with some students for follow-up appointments. In any case, we will be getting back to everyone within two weeks.

\*Thank applicant for a productive interview.

---

**INTERVIEW RECAP**

<u>Dimensions Interviewed</u>	<u>Applicant:</u> <u>Comments</u>	<u>Rating</u>
1. Job Motivation	_____	_____ 2.
Decision Making	_____	
3. Stress Tolerance	_____	
4. Oral Communication Skills	_____	

<u>Remaining Dimensional Profile</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Rating</u>
1. Leadership	_____	
2. Initiative	_____	
3. Energy	_____	
4. Persuasiveness	_____	
5. Oral Presentation Skills	_____	
6. Planning & Organizing	_____	

**FUTURE ACTION**

Overall

comments

RATINGS

5 Excessive

4 Superior

3 Acceptable

-----

2 Below standard

1 Unacceptable

Refer 2nd/3rd

Reject

OVERALL RATING