Communication Strategies:
Interview Skills

Use the following eight techniques as you prepare for a professional interview:

1⇒ Research

Think about the 3 R’s of Research before you go into your interview
-Research yourself
-Research the position
-Research the company

2⇒ Organizing Your Thoughts

To avoid cluttered and prolonged answers, think about organizing answers as you would a “three paragraph essay,” each answer should have a:

Beginning   (give an overview or preview of what you want to discuss)
Middle      (the bulk of your answer)
End         (give resolution to the answer, and end with strong a note of finality)

3⇒ Top 3 Take-A-Way’s

Think about the top three things you want your interviewer to know about you before you leave the interview room. An interviewer’s questions may not always give you an opportunity to discuss your top attributes or experiences; you must do your best to weave your agenda into your answers. Preparing your “top 3 take-a-way’s” before the interview can help you focus your answers. A sample student’s top three take-a-way’s:

1) I completed an internship last semester with the IRS
2) I am involved in campus leadership activities and organizations
3) I have a high GPA and excelled in school

4⇒ Handling Behavioral or Scenario Based Questions

Behavioral interview questions include questions that ask about a real-life scenario, for example ‘tell me about a time when you achieved a goal you set for yourself” or “tell me about a time you had a conflict with a co-worker and how you handled it.”

To answer behavioral questions develop 4-6 “short stories” you can mold to fit different questions. Pick some life situations that are positive and some that are negative situations where you learned something or overcame a challenge. Develop short stories about a variety of life situations: experiences in school, a leadership position, school organizations, a past job, an achievement you had in your personal life or with friends or family. Actually outline and bullet point your answers at home before the interview, this will help you remember them.

Use the STAR model to outline an answer to a scenario question:

S- describe the SITUATION you were in.
T- describe the TASK you performed.
A- what ACTION did you take?
R- what were the RESULTS of your actions?
5 Give Your Answers the Right Spin

As you develop your answers think about the following themes:

Pull out the professional— focus on the transferable skills from your past experiences, what was professional about what you did and how can that transfer into the job for which you are interviewing?

Use positive spin— especially with negatives, always circle your answer back to what you learned, how you grew as a person, what was achieved in the end

Stay employer focused— brag about yourself, but put your answers in term of what you can do for the employer or the organization. How can you contribute your skills and background to the employer’s goals and mission?

6 Pause or Delay, If Needed

It is okay to take pause time before you answer a question and to ask to return to a question latter in the interview:

- After you are asked a question, take 5-10 seconds to gather your thoughts and mentally outline your answer. Take a deep breath.

- If there is a question you do not know how to answer you have at least one “pass” where you can ask the interviewer if you can think about the question and then return to it later. It is then your responsibility to return to the question later, “I have been thinking about your questions and I think I have an answer I would like to share with you…”

7 Fielding Illegal Questions

There are some questions which are illegal for employers to ask.

Are you a US citizen? How old are you? Do you have any disabilities? Have you ever been arrested? Are you married? Do you have children?

Think about the intention of the question, and using positive spin, see if you can address the employer’s core concern: “Do you have children?” may be answered by saying, “my family really supports my career, we have a great support network, and in my last position I was commended for my strong attendance and reliability as a team member.”

8 Do You Have Any Questions for Us?

Be prepared with 3-4 questions for the employer. It is not appropriate to discuss salary or benefits until you have been offered the job. Some appropriate topics might include:

- typical day - do people socialize outside of the office
- corporate ethics - what do you like about working here
- corporate culture - how are projects allocated
- favorite part of the job - why the position has come open