

ou've been preparing for the job interview for what seems like months. You've done employer research, written a resume and a cover letter to accompany it, and developed a self-marketing plan. All of this work has now brought you to the employment interview, the grand finale of your job search.

Thinking about going on an interview is like thinking about going to the dentist: It's nerve-wracking and hard to be calm in anticipating the actual event.

Fortunately, interviews aren't as unpredictable as cavities. Most interviews follow a fairly standard format. By becoming familiar with this format, both the employer and the applicant can learn what to expect during an interview. And, doing something familiar is always easier than facing an unknown.

Participating in an interview is a necessary component in any job search. An employer cannot make a final hiring decision based on just an applicant's paperwork. Reviewing the cover letter, resume and application are cant.

Still, this paper screening process is very beneficial to both the employer and the applicant. It provides a detailed picture of the applicant's employment qualifications for the job. However, something is still missing. An applicant's important character traits, such as communication skills, appearance and attitude, can be determined only in a face-to-face meeting. That is why the interview is the last and most important step in the hiring process.

During the interview, the employer wants to learn as much as possible about you and your qualifications in relationship to a specific job. This is true whether it is just an initial screening interview or a more in-depth one based on information gleaned from earlier interviews.

Remember, any interview is a twoway street. It is also your chance to make a decision about the employer. During an interview, you will be gathering information about a job position you could not learn from an advertisement, namely, the corporate culture of the organization and how it works. It is an opportunity to meet the prospective employer, evaluate the facility and reach your own decision about whether the place is right for you. work, perhaps you will choose a community hospital or a national chain. But whether your choice is large or small, you will have to participate in an interview. Due to differences in healthcare organizations' size and sophistication, the number of interviews necessary for a job offer vary. A good rule of thumb is, the larger the organization, the greater the number of interviews before getting hired.

So, depending on where you want to work, you will be interviewed by a healthcare recruiter, an employment manager, a clinical supervisor in charge of your chosen specialty or the manager responsible for your discipline's entire department. And, in some cases you may have interviews with all of these. For instance, as you apply for positions of increased responsibility, you are likely to participate in two or more interviews. But no matter how many interviews you experience, they will all have the same basic anatomy.

f you are going to have more than one interview within an organization, the first one will be a preliminary or screening interview. Someone in the human resources department, or a recruiter working in conjunction with

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sented in the advertisements, seem as though they might be right for you: They are in the city, their benefits meet your needs, and they offer your desired clinical specialty. As an added bonus, your friend and roommate may also be interested in these hospitals.

The first hospital contact you make is not your top choice but the hospital you ranked third. You consciously decided to save the most important one until last. This allows you to experience the interviewing process, make mistakes and learn from them.

You contact your third-choice hospital, not by a telephone call but by going to see the nurse recruiter. Since you have never applied for a professional position, you are unfamiliar with what to do. But, you walk into the office and ask if you can apply for a job.

The secretary at the desk is very busy answering the telephone and typing. In between phone calls, she hands you an application, saying, "Fill this out and bring it back." date for an interview can be arranged with the manager of your requested specialty unit. You thank each other and leave.

As you leave, you are uncomfortable with the results of the interview. You question how much you really learned about the hospital and what they learned about you. Overall, you did not feel very welcome. But you decide to go ahead with the unit manager's interview and see what happens.

As you wait for the hospital to call you back with an interview date, you decide to call ahead for an appointment at your second-choice hospital. You call the nurse recruiter's office. When the secretary answers the phone, you introduce yourself and explain you are a graduate nurse looking for a position at the hospital. The secretary calls you by name, informs you they have a newgraduate orientation program and tells you when it starts. She invites you for an interview and gives you the name of the recruiter with whom you will be talking. Together, you agree on a time

interests you about them, and how school is going. As the conversation continues, you and the recruiter discuss more details about your chosen clinical unit, such as the patient-care delivery system and the nurse-patient ratios. More questions follow. The recruiter asks about your long-range career goals and what strengths and weaknesses you discovered about yourself in school. The recruiter also questions you about your past work experiences and relationships: what you do when you have confrontations with people and what you will do when you have trouble with co-workers. During the discussion, some of the questions make you uncomfortable. You are not sure just what you should say and sometimes you feel you've said the wrong

After about 30 minutes, the recruiter suggests you talk with the manager of the medical-surgical unit where you would like to work. In a few minutes, the manager arrives and the recruiter makes the introductions. The manager invites you to tour the unit.

On the way to the unit, you discuss your interest in the hospital, your studies in school, and what you are looking for in your first professional position. When you arrive at the manager's office, a discussion begins about the unit. The manager describes the kind of patients on the unit, the nurse-patient ratios, her management philosophy, the work-scheduling process, and the orientation program. You ask several questions addressing your responsibilities as a new graduate and a newly licensed RN. As the discussion comes to an end, the two of you tour the unit. The unit seems big, busy and very demanding. You thank each other and agree to talk again before the end of the week.

As you leave, you are very impressed with the hospital. But, as with your first experience, you feel a bit uncomfortable. There was something about the unit that makes you insecure and unsure about your ability to practice safely.

As your journey continues, you can't quite get your recent interviews out of your mind. Something about them, although you're unsure what, concerns

To take this journey, you must sharpen your powers of observation and believe in your instincts.

You are put off by the tone in her voice and her lack of concern. But you do as she says. When you are finished with the application, you are told the recruiter is busy: "Did you expect to just walk in and have an interview?" Fortunately, the secretary asks you to wait and checks with the recruiter. She returns to tell you the recruiter will see you in a few minutes.

Soon, the recruiter appears and introduces herself. She then invites you into her office. As you sit down, the recruiter asks how you found out about the hospital, and what units you are interested in. She describes the hospital, its benefits, pay rates, orientation, and philosophy. She asks what subjects you liked in school and where your career interests lie. You courteously answer all her questions. Then, the recruiter ends the interview by saying they will call you when a

and date for the interview. You thank each other and hang up. This time you feel the secretary was really interested in you. You begin to look forward to the interview.

Being excited about your recent conversation, you decide to call your first-choice hospital and use the same approach. The conversation is similar and you hang up really excited about this third up-coming interview. As you reflect on all three conversations, you realize you are not really interested in your third-choice hospital.

On the day for the interview with your second-choice hospital, you arrive at the recruiter's office on time. The recruiter comes out to greet you and offers you something to drink.

You enter her office and begin a friendly exchange of information about why you chose their hospital, what

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present themselves in a positive and professional way will be considered for current job vacancies and be asked back for a second interview.

The second, and usually final, interview for new graduates is conducted by someone within your discipline's department with the authority to hire personnel. Often, the interview will be arranged by the recruitment office. Be sure you ask for the name and title of the person who will be conducting the second interview.

This second interview is a little bit different. The department manager knows you have been screened and have met the basic criteria for the job. So, instead of asking you questions to determine your qualifications, the manager will be assessing your ability to be a team player and how you will fit in with your potential team members. There will probably be no direct questions on how you will fit in with the existing team, but throughout the interview, your communication skills, self-confidence and general attitude toward the job and the organization will be assessed.

In this interview, you will also be asked pertinent questions about how you would handle certain situations in the clinical setting and how you might solve problems that could arise.

You should always prepare for both the preliminary and final interviews before the scheduled days. You may not think of preparation as part of an interview. But, the amount of time spent in preplanning will help you answer questions with confidence and place you in a job where you can grow professionally and attain your desired

goals. Refer to Interview Preparation: How to Avoid Surprises in this issue for more details.

Besides the preparatory phase, every interview has three components: an opening, a period of information exchange and a closure.

Opening

The opening phase of the interview is important. It is where you and the interviewer establish a pleasant rapport and get acquainted. As introductions are exchanged, catch your breath and tell the interviewer something positive about yourself. This is the time to make a good first impression.

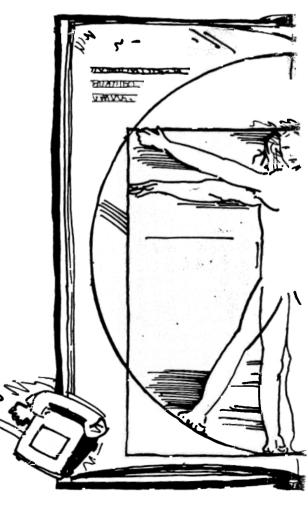
A good interviewer will take the lead in this opening phase by trying to put you at ease. The more comfortable, or at least the less terrified, you feel, the more conducive the situation is for finding out what the interviewer needs to know. And the better you will be able to evaluate the information you are receiving.

The interviewer is often uncomfortable in this situation, too. In fact, many have developed a format to help them relax in the opening phase of the interview. One common approach is to tell you the sequence of what will take place during the interview. If it is a screening interview, he may also tell you about the organization as a whole or the new-graduate orientation program for your discipline.

By your behavior during this opening phase, you will be demonstrating how well you can adjust and communicate in a stressful situation. If you are pleasant and friendly in the interview situation, the interviewer will think you will display the same behavior in the work environment.

Exchanging Information

The next part of the interview is an exchange of information. Now is the time for you to expand on the introductory outline your resume provided the interviewer by giving any details not



"The preliminary or screening interview is an essential step in the hiring process. Don't underestimate its importance."

included in your resume.

This is also the time during an interview where the interviewer will ask you job-related questions to determine if you are qualified for the position. For more information, refer to our article entitled, Questions, Questions and More Questions.

In almost every interview, the interviewer asks a question the applicant cannot answer. Don't be embarrassed; simply say you do not know. They don't expect you to know everything.

If the interviewer phrases a question so a simple "yes" or "no" will answer

it, don't stop there. The interviewer can't learn much from a one-word answer. Elaborate on your response to a reasonable extent, so the interviewer can get enough information to determine your qualifications.

The exchange of information phase is also the time for you to ask a few questions. It's perfectly appropriate to take out a notepad with prepared questions and jot down the replies.

This is a good time for you to ask the interviewer to clarify anything you did not understand during the interview. You don't want to walk away with unanswered questions or unresolved issues.

Be prepared to discuss yourself during this part of the interview. The organization is hiring more than just an educated automaton — they are hiring the whole person and they want to know about that whole person. This is where you can use your self-marketing plan to come out a winner.

Closure

The closing part of the interview is the chance to ask any last-minute questions, both for you and the interviewer. This is also when topics such as benefits and company policies are discussed.

The interviewer should tell you the length of time before the hiring decision will be made. For example, he may say, "I'm interviewing for the next two weeks and you should hear from us within a week after that." If he does not tell you, you should ask. You should

also find out if the interviewer will contact you directly, or if someone else will. If you have not already provided references, this is the time you will most likely be asked for them. If additional interviews are required, they will be mentioned here.

Sometimes, interviews are hard to end but they always do. And, usually much faster than you ever dreamed possible. In the final few minutes of closure, remember to always thank the interviewer for his time.

Lithough you may encounter several different types of interviews. there is no need to panic. All of them will have the same basic anatomy. In each one, there is a preparatory phase, an opening, a period of information exchange and a closure. The purpose of a standard format is two-fold. It provides the most efficient and least stressful way for the employer to find out about you and your usefulness to the organization. Secondly, and perhaps most important, it gives you an opportunity to learn about the organization and decide if it's where you want to start your professional career.

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