Interviewing

AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD understand

- open and closed, primary and secondary, and neutral and leading questions.
- the function of each of the following interview parts: the opening, the body, and the closing.

be able to

- construct and conduct an informational interview.
- prepare a resume and cover letter for an employment interview.
- apply techniques to improve your communication in an employment interview.
George is very excited. He is about to become the first member of his family to earn a college degree. It has taken him several years of night classes to graduate and now he is going to have his first job interview for a management position at a local engineering firm. He and his family have sacrificed their time together as well as the family savings for George to get his degree, but now it will all be worth it. This new job promises a large increase in pay and excellent benefits.

As he waits in the "holding" room with the other interviewees, George is confident that he and the recruiter will hit it off. George rehearses his opening comments about the score of the last local baseball game and how great the championship was for the city. He knows the interviewer will be impressed by his knowledge of sports—a very popular topic at the office. George knows he will fit in with the other "guys."

A young African American woman calls George's name and motions for him to follow her. When they reach the interviewing room, Gloria offers her hand for George to shake and invites him to sit down on one of the chairs in the room. George shakes her hand and asks, "When will the recruiter arrive? I am awfully anxious about this interview and hope it will begin soon."

George's jaw drops when Gloria hands him her business card that reads, "Gloria McFerson, Senior Recruiter." She says, "The recruiter is right here and I'd like to begin the interview right now. I know you must be nervous, but try not to be. I just want to spend a few minutes getting to know you and discussing your qualifications for the position."
In this chapter, we'll see how the concepts of perception, listening, self-concept, self-disclosure, and communication climate affect the interviewing process. In addition, we will learn about interview organization, questions, and types of interviews.

Like George, we all feel uneasy when we interview for a job. When we think about being interviewed, one word may come to mind: fear. What are some factors that contribute to our anxiety? First, there is the risk of participating in an interview. We are not certain about whether we will get the job, and if we do not, can we handle the rejection? Second, it is difficult to interact with someone we have just met, especially when we realize this person will be judging our responses. And third, many of us are unsure about how to conduct ourselves during an interview. This chapter attempts to alleviate some of our anxieties about interviewing by explaining what an interview is and how we can improve our part within the interaction.

An interview is a planned and purposeful interaction between two parties in which questions are asked and answers are given. The party who asks the questions is the interviewer; the responding party is the interviewee. The "interviewer" can be more than one person, such as a group of board members, department personnel, or panel members. When we think of interviews, the first kind that comes to mind is the employment interview. There are, however, several other types of interviews: physicians gather information from their patients; mortgage loan officers gather information from prospective homeowners; contractors ask customers about the special features to be included in their kitchen, bathroom, or sunroom; and reference librarians ask patrons about the kind of information they need to answer their questions. A wide variety of careers and jobs require you to understand the dynamics of an interview.

The interview builds on several of the concepts discussed earlier in this book. For instance, listening plays a crucial role in the interviewing process, since both participants must actively listen to each other's responses. Questions need to be worded with precision and clarity so that they communicate the intent of the sender, so language is important. Nonverbal communication is also crucial to the process. Participants need to observe both deliberate and accidental responses. Both parties need to be sensitive to their own interactions in order to respond appropriately to the other party's communication. A supportive climate set by the interviewer will allow for more self-disclosure. Most importantly, like all other communication interactions, a successful interview hinges on both participants understanding and appreciating the other's diverse approach to the situation. The interviewer and the interviewee come to the interview with their own past experiences, culture, and social roles.

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Interviews contain a wide range of questions. While interviewers must formulate appropriate questions, interviewees should try to anticipate the types of questions that will be asked. On a job interview, for example, we expect to be asked about former positions we have held or why we think we are qualified for the job. Anticipating such questions can help us feel more comfortable with the interviewing
process and, in turn, increase our ability to respond to questions. Several kinds of questions emerge during an interview, including the following pairings: open and closed, primary and secondary, and neutral and leading.

## Open and Closed Questions

**Open questions** are nonrestrictive questions designed to give the respondent maximum latitude in formulating an answer. They provide an opportunity for interviewees to reveal more information about themselves: their feelings, philosophies, and biases. A question such as "What are your feelings about the war in Iraq?" allows us to voice our opinion about the issue. At the same time, open questions are often successful in establishing an atmosphere of give and take between the interviewer and interviewee.

Open questions can be problematic, however. Consider the fact that our response to an open question, both in terms of the subject matter covered and the amount of time used, is beyond the interviewer's control. In fact, much of the information we yield in response to an open question can be far removed from the interviewer's purpose. For example, if our response to the question about the war in Iraq digressed into a discussion of the torture of detained combatants, the interviewer would be getting more than he or she bargained for (in this case, the interviewer was simply looking for some indication of degree of public support for U.S. involvement in Iraq). Consider, too, that inexperienced interviewees or those with a low self-esteem might feel particularly anxious about responding to open questions because they are afraid to disclose personal information or they are afraid that their responses might be too off-base.

**Closed questions** are designed to elicit specific feedback from the respondent. They are especially useful in conducting surveys or polls in which the interviewer plans to statistically compare the responses. The interviewee's responses to closed questions should be brief.

The following series of closed questions could be used in a public opinion poll:

1. Do you support U.S. involvement in Iraq?
2. Should the United States have a permanent presence in Iraq?
3. When should the United States withdraw from Iraq?
4. Are the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan connected?

These questions, and several more like them, are necessary in order to gauge the public's attitude and knowledge of the war in Iraq. It might take dozens of closed questions to determine the attitudes expressed in response to just one open question. Closed questions, however, are not meant to probe or explore another person's feelings or values; rather, their intent is to simply gather facts or discern what is already suspected by the interviewer.

### Primary and Secondary Questions

**Primary questions** are those questions that introduce a major area of discussion to be guided by the interviewer. Whenever the interviewer summarizes one area of discussion and then moves in a new direction, the initial question he or she asks is known as a primary question. For example, a sportscaster might kick off each new
Most polls include closed questions because the answers can easily be compared.

area of an interview by asking the following questions of a baseball manager whose team just clinched the American League Pennant: “What did you say to your players before the start of today’s game?” “What was the turning point in this deciding game?” “Did you ever lose confidence in your team?” “Who do you plan to start in game one of the World Series?” The sportscaster is able to introduce several key issues, each with a separate primary question. Interviewers generally prepare primary questions ahead of time. By the same token, interviewees can usually anticipate that some of these questions will be asked during the interview.

Secondary questions are designed to gain additional information from the interviewee. The interviewer is asking that we clarify or expand our response to the primary question. General questions such as “What do you mean?” “I don’t think I fully understand your point,” or “Why do you say that?” can be used, or the secondary questions can be more specific. For instance, as a follow-up to the primary question, “Who do you plan to start in game one of the World Series?” the sportscaster might ask: “Will his arm have enough rest with only three days off?” “Are you worried about the number of walks he gave up during the two games he pitched in the Championship Series?” Certain nonverbal behaviors also can function as secondary questions. A raised eyebrow or a searching look might indicate that the interviewee needs to clarify or expand on his or her response to the last question.

Secondary questions also provide an opportunity for both parties to clear up any misunderstandings about statements made earlier in the interview because they allow us to check our perceptions. In addition, they allow the interviewee to give more detailed answers. Ultimately, this may affect how the interviewer interprets information, or reaches a decision, in the case of job interviews.
Recognizing Types of Questions

After reading each question, determine whether it is (a) open or closed, (b) primary or secondary, or (c) neutral or leading.

1. What experience do you have with Microsoft Word?
2. When you say you have great people skills, what do you mean?
3. Why did you choose to major in political science?
4. You are looking for a challenging career, aren't you?
5. Don't you wish all days were as beautiful as today?
6. Which college course helped you to develop your writing skills?
7. What do you think about censorship?
8. Could you explain why you are applying for this position?
9. What questions do you have about the position?
10. Having a strong policy against sexual harassment is great for the company, isn't it?

How can determining the types of questions help you enhance your confidence as a communicator?

Neutral and Leading Questions

Neutral questions are those questions that reveal nothing of the interviewer's biases, preferences, or expectations. There is no "right" or "wrong" response to such questions as "Are accounting courses better at night or in the day?" "How do you like to spend your leisure time?" Leading questions are designed to move the interview in a specific direction. "Don't you agree that part-time students who work are more serious about their courses?" "Television coverage can make or break a politician's career, wouldn't you agree?" In the preceding questions, the interviewee is being led to a specific response. Leading questions can create problems, however. People can become extremely defensive when they feel forced to give responses that do not truly represent their views. This can increase the level of tension within the interview.

Organizing the Interview

How do we incorporate the different types of questions discussed in the preceding section into the interview itself? To answer this question, we need to explore the issue of organizing the interview. While the following discussion is presented from the perspective of the interviewer, it should be of equal value to the interviewee. An awareness of the interview's structure can help the interviewee anticipate the types of questions he or she will be asked.
In many ways, the structure of an interview follows the pattern of a speech, which we will discuss in Chapter 13. Consequently, there are three parts to the interview: the opening, the body, and the conclusion.

The Opening

The opening begins the interview. Its general function is to establish rapport between the two parties and to clarify the interview's purpose and scope. What the interviewer says during the opening generally sets the tone for the rest of the interview. His or her ability to create a positive communication climate (see Chapter 7) depends, in part, on how interpersonally skilled he or she is. One way to create a positive climate is to create common ground with the interviewee. Common ground means that the interviewer and the interviewee share an interest, value, and past experience. Because the interviewer and interviewee are coming to the situation from different perspectives and with different and diverse approaches, it is important for the interviewer to find something he or she shares in common with the interviewee.

The opening is an appropriate place to ask some general questions in order to relax the interviewee. These warm-up questions, often open in nature, give the interviewee an opportunity to express himself or herself in general terms: "Did you have any trouble finding the office?" "Have you been enjoying this unseasonably warm weather?" This process often reduces the tension for both interviewer and interviewee alike. The sequence should remain brief, however, lest the interviewee become nervous about supplying "correct" answers to these questions.

The Body

The next segment of the interview is the body. This is where the major part of the interview occurs. In developing the body, we must first determine the degree of flexibility we feel is appropriate for the interview. We might characterize the body in many ways. Charles Stewart and William Cash describe several methods to organize your questions. Three of the most important are highly scheduled, moderately scheduled, and nonscheduled (2008, pp. 86–89).

Highly Scheduled Body

A highly scheduled body includes all the questions that the interviewer plans to ask. Most of these questions are closed, leaving little opportunity for secondary questions to arise. Marketing surveys and public opinion polls follow a highly structured body. In employment interviews, the highly structured body generally works best for the inexperienced or untrained interviewer. The security of having a prepared list of questions in advance simplifies the process, especially for the novice. For instance, a newly promoted store manager may have little or no experience interviewing others for a position in sales. For her first interviewing experience, a prepared list of questions might be a wise choice. She can move from one question to the next, taking time to listen to the response given after each question. What a highly scheduled body does not invite, however, is a spontaneous exchange between interviewer and interviewee. This is generally achieved during a moderately or nonscheduled interview, where the interviewer is more experienced.
In a *moderately scheduled body*, the interviewer determines the primary questions ahead of time. These serve only as a foundation for the rest of the interview, however. The interviewer proceeds on the premise that the interviewee’s responses will trigger secondary, related questions. In other words, the interview is open to give and take between the two parties. The moderately scheduled interview offers flexibility and a sense of naturalness. It is an excellent format for someone who has experience as an interviewer.

For example, the interviews conducted by Oprah Winfrey follow a moderately structured format regardless of the show’s topic or the guests. Ms. Winfrey determines the topics she wants to cover prior to airtime. Once the initial questions are asked, however, she allows the interviewee’s responses to dictate some of her follow-up questions. Of course, as a highly skilled interviewer, Ms. Winfrey is always able to bring the topic back into sharp focus if the conversation goes too far afield.

**Moderately Scheduled Body**

The *non-scheduled body* provides maximum flexibility for both the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer works from an outline of topics, but no actual questions. According to Stewart and Cash, this type of interview works well when the topic is extremely broad, the interviewee is uneasy or reluctant to participate, or when the interviewer has little time to prepare a schedule of questions (2008, p. 86). For example:

Linsey has been researching her informative speech topic of “crime on campus.” As she walks to her car, she notices that the campus police have surrounded one of the buildings. She rushes over to the police officer in charge to find out what has happened. The officer says that she cannot speak with Linsey at that moment, but if she comes by the police station in 30 minutes, the officer can answer her questions. Linsey has little time to prepare a list of questions, so instead creates an outline of topic areas she hopes the police officer can elaborate on during the interview.

**The Closing**

In some respects, an interview’s *closing* is similar to the opening. One of its purposes is to end on a positive note, reinforcing the positive climate created in the opening. To end an interview abruptly could destroy an otherwise positive climate. In “winding down” the interview, the interviewer might say, “I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.” This invitation provides the interviewee with an opportunity to ask a few final questions in order to clarify any uncertain factors: “Do the four store managers meet on a regular basis to discuss sales and advertising strategies?” “Do you encourage your managers to submit their suggestions for the company’s advertising campaign?” After the interviewee’s questions are addressed, the interviewer thanks him or her for participating in the session: “I’m glad you and I had this opportunity to talk. Thanks for coming in today.”
Embracing Difference

Interviewing Styles

Jon Stewart, Oprah Winfrey, Barbara Walters, and Chris Matthews are all successful interviewers. Observe two of the above personalities and answer the following questions:

1. What types of interviews did you observe?
2. What was the primary goal of each interview?
3. How did the interviewers set the climate for the interview?
4. What types of body language did each interviewer use?
5. What types of questions did the interviewers ask?
6. How were the interviews concluded?
7. List the differences in the interviewers' approaches to the interview.
8. How can the differences used by the interviewers help you as a communicator?

Ethics in Communication

The Employment Interview

In the scenario at the beginning of the chapter, we learn about George and his interview with Gloria McFerson. George is the first one in his family to graduate from college and now that he has earned his degree in engineering, George is excited to interview for a full-time position as a project designer. Of course, he is nervous before the interview and practices things he might say to connect with the recruiter. For example, George rehearses his comments about the latest sports scores.

When Gloria McFerson, a young African American woman, enters the room, George mistakenly assumes she is a secretary or administrative assistant. Gloria is, of course, a recruiter and will be conducting the interview with George. Gloria ignores his preconceived notions of her and continues the interview in a professional manner. As you think about Gloria and George and their overall communication behavior, answer the following questions:

1. What assumptions does George make about engineers? What assumptions does he make about Gloria McFerson? Why do you think he makes these assumptions?
2. What could George have done before the interview to increase his chances of succeeding in this interview? How might you have changed his communicative behavior during the interview?
3. Explain why Gloria's communication is both ethical and effective.
4. Have you ever been in the same situation as George or Gloria? Describe your communication behavior.
We have many opportunities to participate in interviews, including those related to job hiring, parent-teacher conferences, and questioning salespeople about particular consumer products, among others. There are many different types of interviews. These include the information-giving interview, such as a job orientation; the information-gathering interview, such as a survey or research interview; the selection or employment interview; the problem-solving interview; and the persuasive interview, such as that used in cars sales or fundraising (Stewart & Cash, 2008, p. 5).

In addition, the counseling interview takes place between a therapist and a patient, and an exit interview is often required when we leave a job. Of the numerous interviews conducted daily, two are especially significant: the informational interview and the employment interview. The informational interview is presented from the interviewer’s perspective; in it we discuss how to conduct this type of interview. In the section on the employment interview, the focus shifts from interviewer to interviewee. Preinterview preparations are explained, followed by a discussion of communication skills designed to improve our performance during an employment interview.

The Informational Interview

The purpose of an informational interview is to acquire facts about a specific topic. Perhaps our purpose is to gain an understanding of a company procedure or policy, to elicit an octogenarian’s oral history, to determine the strategies used by the local high school football coach, or to learn about the successful techniques of a prominent business executive. Most importantly, you may use an informational interview to solicit support material for your speeches (see Chapter 12). In all these cases, we
must interview someone knowledgeable in a specific area. There are several steps to consider when conducting an informational interview. These include (1) developing the objective, (2) adequately researching the subject, and (3) carefully planning the interview questions.

**Developing the Objective**

A clearly defined interview objective serves several purposes; namely, (1) it communicates the intent of the interview, (2) it helps the interviewer develop appropriate questions, and (3) it establishes a time frame for the interview. By having a clear picture of the interview's intent, both parties better understand the purpose of the interaction and the importance of each of their roles. Having a good idea of where the interview is headed allows the interviewer to outline meaningful questions that remain focused on the stated purpose. Finally, a clearly established objective helps determine a reasonable time frame for the interview. This forces the interviewer to take into consideration the interviewee's time. For example:

- **Ineffective objective:** To learn about your business.
- **Effective objective:** To learn the procedure that your company uses for hiring accountants.
- **Ineffective objective:** To learn about the newspaper business.
- **Effective objective:** To learn about the different types of publishing software.

The first statements in the preceding list are vague, while the second statements clearly establish the parameters of each interview. The interviewer can then proceed to develop concrete questions, while the interviewee has a strong sense of the direction of the interview.

**Researching the Topic**

If the purpose of the interview is to gain information, it is advisable to research the topic ahead of time. Researching the topic helps the interviewer determine what he or she needs to find out during the interview, it prepares the interviewer to ask pertinent questions, and it enhances the interviewer's credibility with the interviewee. Furthermore, researching the topic avoids wasting interview time asking questions that could already have been answered by doing some groundwork. A basic understanding of the interview topic allows the interviewer to respond to the interviewee's comments by asking spontaneous follow-up questions. This task becomes difficult if the interviewer is generally unprepared for the interaction.

**Planning the Interview Questions**

Once the interview objective is determined, the interviewer is ready to develop interview questions. In part, the purpose of the interview dictates the types of questions used; an oral history, for example, tends toward open questions because its purpose is to learn about the individual's experiences. As discussed earlier in this chapter, open questions encourage the interviewee to reveal personal thoughts or
attitudes concerning a particular topic. Open-ended primary questions should be formulated prior to the interview, as should some anticipated follow-up questions. Other secondary questions are interjected during the interview, since they grow out of the interviewee's responses. Whatever questions are used in the interview, they should conform to the structure (high, moderate, or none) deemed most suitable by the interviewer.

Example: Informational Interview
The purpose of this interview is to gather information about obtaining financial aid for college from the Director of Financial Aid Services. It might cover the following three points:

I. Objective: To discover the background and history of financial aid
   a. What is financial aid?
   b. When did financial aid begin?
   c. Why did financial aid become necessary?
   d. Who started financial aid?
   e. Where did financial aid originate?

II. Objective: To find out about the different types of financial aid
   a. What are the types of financial aid available?
   b. What are the requirements to receive financial aid?
   c. What are the eligibility requirements for each type of financial aid?
   d. Why should I apply for financial aid?
   e. How will financial aid benefit me and my family?

III. Objective: To find out how to get financial aid
   a. How do I start the financial aid application process?
   b. Whom do I speak to about getting financial aid?
   c. Where should I apply?
   d. When should I begin seeking financial aid?

THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW

For an employer, the purpose of an employment interview is to uncover information about potential employees and to use that information to hire a new employee; for an applicant, the purpose is to find out more information about a position and to persuade the employer to hire him or her. Such factors as experience, educational background, interpersonal skills, and appearance enter into the employer's decision-making process. In the past, some employers selected applicants on factors not related to job performance, such as gender, race, or religion; today, guidelines prohibit this practice. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has developed strict guidelines for interviewing and testing potential employees. Both employers and employees should be aware of these guidelines, in addition to state laws that govern hiring. In this section we will focus on two aspects of the employment interview: preinterview preparations and communication skills during the interview.
There are several ways for an applicant to prepare for an employment interview. Take the time to assess your employment potential, to compile a clearly structured resume, to write a solid cover letter, to research the company or organization, and to evaluate the interviewer’s perspective in the interviewing process. Each of the steps described in this section has the potential to make you a better prepared, more confident employment candidate.

Self-Assessment

In assessing your employment potential, you want to evaluate your suitability for a particular career. To do this, you must appraise your capabilities and talents in order to determine how well you might fit a particular position. Self-assessment involves asking yourself such questions as (1) Why am I interested in this position? (2) How important is my work to me? (3) Do I have the necessary background for this job? (4) Could I grow into the position?

Many people look to their job to fulfill personal interests. For instance, a person who enjoyed doing research as a history major in college also might enjoy being a research assistant for an advertising firm. It is equally important to take stock of such personal qualities as motivation, intelligence, and sensitivity, because these directly affect your work behavior.

Do any of your personal accomplishments make you a viable candidate for a particular position? For instance, during your term as president of your son’s school’s Parent-Teacher Association, you probably demonstrated supervisory abilities that are applicable to a management position. Likewise, if you were responsible for financing your college education, you certainly demonstrated your ability to manage a budget.

SKILL BUILDING

Preparing for Employment

As you prepare to write your resume and then to interview for jobs, take a few moments to write down your skills, work experience, accomplishments and honors, goals, and strengths and weaknesses.

1. Work experience: jobs, length of employment, skills used
2. Special skills: computer, languages, artistic (music, design)
3. Accomplishments and honors: work, school, community
4. Career goals
5. Strengths and weaknesses: oral and written communication, leadership, small-group work, motivation, dealing with stress, conflict resolution
Self-assessment forces you to realistically examine and evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. This internal review helps you to get a better sense of yourself and at the same time helps you to decide whether or not you are a good candidate for a particular job.

The Resume

A \textit{resume} is a short account of one's qualifications for a particular position. The purpose of a resume is to present one's educational and experiential backgrounds, emphasizing his or her relation to the job under consideration. The resume requires thoughtful preparation and organization, because it is often a key factor in determining which applicants get interviews.

A carefully prepared resume should include the following information: (1) the applicant's name and current address, (2) current place of employment, (3) prior employment and related experience, (4) education/training, and (5) awards, honors, and professional recognition. In addition, the resume may include (1) activities and experiences that highlight leadership potential, (2) career goals, and (3) references. Figure 8.1 presents a sample resume.

The Cover Letter

The \textit{cover letter} is a short letter that introduces you to a prospective employer. Its overall intent is to express your interest in the job and to create a positive first impression. To achieve this goal, the letter must be free of grammatical errors. Additionally, the cover letter should be tailored to the particular job vacancy. You want the organization or company to believe your letter is written expressly for them.

The first paragraph states your reasons for writing to the company. This is the place to indicate the specific position you are applying for and why you are applying for that position.

In the second and third paragraphs, explain your interest in the position and, more importantly, what you can do for the employer. Refer to specific professional or academic experiences, as well as job experiences, that contribute to your qualifications for the position. For instance, college courses in public relations and an internship at the county welfare department are details worth mentioning in a cover letter for a public relations position at the community hospital. This information gets the attention of those individuals who screen applications.

Next, refer to the enclosed or attached resume, which summarizes your training and experience. Also mention where the employer can check your credentials.

In the final paragraph, indicate your desire for a personal interview. You can suggest possible dates or simply indicate your flexibility. Remember, do what you can to encourage further communication. You may wish to call on a certain date to arrange an interview or to find out when a company representative plans to be in the area (such as on your college campus) so you can set up an interview then. Figure 8.2 presents an example of a cover letter.

In recent years, more and more companies are accepting applications (resumes and cover letters) via email. In addition, several websites allow you to post your resume for companies and recruiters to see and evaluate.
MARTIN GABRIEL SENSEDJA
6941 VAN BUREN AVE., WHARTON, OH 45863 • 419-321-0742 • CELL: 419-731-6931 • E-MAIL: mgsditto@hotmail.com

OBJECTIVE Electrical Engineering Technician

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE
- Enthusiastic, rising electrical engineering technology professional with relevant experience and expertise in use of high-tech equipment for analysis, documentation, and presentation; NC programming; computer hardware interface; and circuit design/PCB construction.
- Honest, reliable, punctual team player who exceeds expectations.
- Motivated achiever and problem-solver who will do what it takes to get the job done.
- Solid communicator who can explain technology in easy-to-understand terms; fluent in Spanish; studied nine years in a Spanish-speaking country.

EDUCATION and TRAINING
- Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology, Purdue University, Hammond, IN, May 2011; GPA: 3.43
- Semester Honors for four consecutive semesters
- Clare and Lucy Osterle Scholar
- Harold C. Morgan Scholarship
- A+ Computer Service Technician, Computing Technology Industry Association

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Sales Representative, Radio Shack, Lansing, IL, 08/2008–present
- Serve as electronics replacement and connectivity specialist.
- Assess customers in enhancing their in-home electronic devices.
- Increased sales by tailoring service to customers’ needs and reducing amount of returned merchandise.

Maintenance Engineer, Holiday Inn, West Lafayette, IN, 08/2006–08/2008
- juggled multiple responsibilities while maintaining hotel facility.
- Replaced and repaired electrical systems.
- Reorganized facility.
- Earned Worker of the Month Award, Sept. 2007.

Student, Purdue University, Hammond, IN, 08/2009–present
- Organized, planned, and built a Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine that exceeded expectations and was considered one of the best projects of the semester.
- Conducted research to design, build, and test machine that drilled holes and could rout and engrave.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS
- Member, IEEE

FIGURE 8.1 Sample Resume
6941 Van Buren Ave.
Wharton, OH 45863

January 15, 2010

Mr. Robert Gray, Staffing Specialist
Northern Electronics, Inc.
1605 Revere Street
Morton Grove, IL 60053

Dear Mr. Gray:
I am seeking a cooperative education or internship position in electrical engineering technology. Purdue University Calumet's Career Development Office informed me that Northern Electronics has several positions open for the Spring 2010 semester.

As you can see from my enclosed resume, I have extensive experience in electrical engineering technology from my studies at Purdue University Calumet and my work experience. I am fluent in Spanish and am computer-proficient in several software programs including AutoCAD, Masm, Windows, and Visual Basic. In my studies, I have earned a 3.43 grade point average while working part-time. I have received several scholarships and have earned semester honors for four consecutive semesters.

As an electronics replacement and connectivity specialist, I have experience with many different types of home and office electronics. I also have extensive experience with customer service. I am a member of IEEE.

I am available for employment beginning August 2010. I hope to complete an internship by June 2010 when I will earn my Bachelor of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. Please contact me at (419) 321-0742 or (419) 731-6931. My e-mail address is mgsditto@hotmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Martin G. Sendejas

enc.
Company Research

Finding out all you can about a particular company or organization will help you be better informed at the time of the interview. What kinds of things should you research? If the position is with a manufacturing company, learn about its products, the location of its plants, and the company's history, financial status, and growth potential. Websites like Vault.com and WetFeet.com are designed especially for new college graduates and include company research, industry profiles, salary information, a day in the life, and much more. Other sources include websites such as Monster.com, Dice.com, and others that have already done the research for you. (See the Communication and Technology box on pages 162–163.) Another sound practice is to conduct research in your field or discipline. Find out about such things as average starting salaries, trends, current and future problems, and what the work is like on a day-to-day basis.

The Interviewer

Ideally, a prospective employer comes to an interview prepared to ask pertinent questions of the applicant and to supply information about the company. In many instances, the interviewer alone determines whether or not the interviewee will be considered for the position. In a well-structured interview, the interviewer has a clear set of primary questions that constitute the body of the interview. Typical questions might include “What prompted you to apply for a job with our company?” “On your application you state that you have work-related experience. Would you please elaborate?” “What are your career goals?” “What qualities do you possess that would convince me to hire you over applicants with similar training for this position?” The interviewee’s responses to these questions can be revealing; from them the employer assesses the applicant’s general knowledge, ability to communicate, prior achievements, ambitions for the future, and suitability for the job. Table 8.1 lists some of the most popular questions interviewers ask in an employment interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Employment Interview Questions</th>
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<td>1. Tell me about yourself.</td>
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<td>2. Describe your work experience at ____</td>
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<td>3. Why did you decide on ____ field of study?</td>
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<td>4. Why do you want to work in this industry?</td>
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<td>5. How do you describe success?</td>
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<td>6. What motivates you to do your best work?</td>
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<td>7. What are your short-term goals?</td>
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<td>8. What are your long-term goals?</td>
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<td>9. What is your greatest strength?</td>
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<td>10. Provide an example of how you used this strength to succeed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. What is your greatest weakness?</td>
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<td>12. How has this weakness hindered your success?</td>
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<td>13. How has your education at ____ prepared you for this position?</td>
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<td>14. What about this position excites you the most?</td>
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<td>15. Why did you apply to this company?</td>
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Anxiety and nervousness are common reactions to an impending employment interview. To a degree, relief is possible by immersing ourselves in the process, that is, by concentrating on the questions generated by the interviewer and by applying specific communication skills to our responses. These skills include effective listening, ethics, language, effective nonverbal communication, and asking questions. Although these topics are treated in previous chapters, their specific application to the employment interview is discussed in the following subsections.

Listening

Without question, listening is an important aspect of the interview. Effective listening requires that we do two things: (1) listen closely to detect the exact nature of the interview questions, and (2) listen to the interviewer's responses to our answers in order to gauge how well we are doing in the session, to learn more about what is important to the interviewer, and to be able to keep conversing intelligently. Be sure to use the listening skills we described in Chapter 3: paraphrasing, interpreting, and questioning. These skills will help you check your perceptions of the interviewer and the questions he or she is asking.

The Internet and the Job Hunt

The Internet is a wonderful tool for finding a job. Whether you are looking to change jobs or for your first job, the Internet can provide many kinds of information. For example, with a few clicks of the mouse, you can find information on resume writing (via regular mail or via email), company research, and job postings. Some websites offer forums and chatrooms for job seekers to network and share stories and advice. Here are a few helpful general sites:

1. Monster.com. This site offers information on every aspect of the job search. It can even match your qualifications with jobs posted by employers. It is useful for all types of careers and majors.
2. Collegegrad.com. This site is similar to Monster.com in that it offers general information on the job search. Collegegrad.com, however, is geared toward entry-level jobs. First-time job seekers will find specific information on how to prepare for the first job.
3. Careerbuilder.com. This site offers job listings nationally and internationally. Over one million jobs are listed and can be searched by location, industry, field, or specific job title.

There are also sites dedicated to specific fields or careers. Some of these include:

1. Healthcarejobsite.com is for nursing, medical professions, and pharmaceuticals.
2. Careerbank.com posts positions in accounting, banking, and other finance jobs.
3. Dice.com specializes in high-tech engineering and information technology positions.
4. abcteachingjobs.com contains information on teacher certification by state and also job postings for elementary and secondary school teachers.

5. eLabRat.com posts jobs in science and chemistry and offers information about resume writing and interviewing for science-related jobs.

6. TalentZoo.com offers advice and job listings for job seekers in communication areas such as advertising, marketing, public relations, and media.


8. Salesjobs.com is dedicated to sales professionals.

One of our chief concerns in an interview is to be able to provide intelligent answers to interview questions. In order to do so, we must first understand the question. Listening closely to the interviewer is essential; however, a second step is sometimes warranted—asking for clarification when we do not fully understand what the interviewer wants. For example, to make sure that we are on target, we might paraphrase an interviewer's question this way: "Am I interpreting your question correctly? You want me to explain what steps I would take to correct an employee's chronic tardiness?" When the interviewer confirms that we have understood the question correctly, we feel comfortable offering our response.

Following our answer, the interviewer may make some comments before moving on to the next question. Listening to this feedback is just as important as listening to the questions themselves, because it provides us with clues concerning our performance. For instance, if the interviewer clearly misunderstands our reply, we need to clarify our position in order to eliminate the misunderstanding. This problem can be rectified only if we are listening closely to the feedback being given.

Finally, by listening carefully to the interviewer's questions and feedback, we can avoid asking questions or making comments about something that has already
been mentioned in the interview. When we are nervous, this happens more frequently. The key here is to shift the focus away from ourselves (that is, our preoccupation about how stressful this interview is) to the other party, to pay close attention to the interviewer's message.

**Ethics**

One of our objectives during an interview is to present an honest picture of ourselves. This requires that we represent our skills accurately and that we take responsibility for any difficulties that we may have had in previous jobs. Misrepresentation of skills or experiences threatens both the likelihood that we will be selected for the position and, if we are selected, the chances of maintaining our employment. Consider the following:

Sean has just graduated with a degree in public relations. He secured several internships and feels well qualified to write press releases and create brochures and other print promotional materials. He tells a prospective employer at the local finance company that he has web page design experience in order to appear better qualified for the job; despite his misrepresentation of the facts, Sean lands the position. Two months later he is asked to create a new web page for the personnel department. It becomes immediately apparent to Sean’s boss that Sean misrepresented his abilities during the job interview. Sean has jeopardized his employment with the firm.

During the interview, questions may be raised about our reasons for leaving a previous job. It is best to offer straightforward responses to such questions: “I saw no place to advance within the company’s structure. After four years I grew tired of doing the same job day after day. I needed a change to feel self-motivated again.” “I found myself increasingly frustrated by the unresolved problems and tension between my supervisor and myself. Because I saw no sign of improvement for the future, I decided to find another job.” Avoid placing the blame on other parties; it suggests a weakness on your part, an inability to adequately work through difficulties with others.

**Language**

Answering interview questions with direct, precise language communicates both a knowledge of the subject and a confidence in our own abilities. Precise language, especially terminology related to a specific occupation or profession, demonstrates our familiarity with the field: “I’ve worked with children at two preschools during the past seven years. In my opinion, a preschool curriculum should stress the development of gross motor skills, socialization skills, and reading readiness skills.” Furthermore, being able to provide direct, concrete explanations communicates our self-assurance: “Reading readiness includes teaching such concepts as letter recognition and sounds, numbers, left and right, and sequencing (first, second, third).” Conversely, vague or general responses indicate a lack of knowledge or expertise and an apparently weaker job candidate. The lesson here is to know the subject and to show the interviewer that we know the subject by expressing ourselves with appropriate language.
Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication can indicate our level of confidence within the interviewing situation. When we are nervous, for example, we communicate our discomfort not only through our verbal responses, but also through our nonverbal behavior. Signs of discomfort include averting our eyes each time the interviewer looks directly at us, repeated shifting in our seat, wringing our hands, and forced smiles.

In an employment interview, we want our nonverbal communication to support our other efforts to appear confident in the interaction. In other words, our effort to listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and comments can be accompanied by our effort to maintain direct eye contact. If we look away when the interviewer speaks to us, we will seem nervous and uninvolved. Likewise, our verbal replies to interview questions can benefit from appropriate gestures and paralanguage. For example, when we talk enthusiastically about our career goals, we can add to that positive image by using hand gestures, by increasing the rate of our speech, and by raising the pitch of our voice. (Chapter 5 has an in-depth discussion of these and other nonverbal communication behaviors.)

Ask Questions

At the end of the interview, you will probably be asked if you have any questions for the recruiter. It is essential that you ask at least two questions to show you are prepared and interested in the position. These questions can illustrate that you have thoroughly researched the company and that you are motivated to know more about the interviewer and the position. Table 8.2 lists some possible questions you might ask during or at the close of an employment interview.

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<tr>
<th>Questions to Ask the Recruiter</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. What qualities do you want this employee to have?</td>
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<td>2. How are employees evaluated and how often?</td>
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<td>3. Why do you like working here?</td>
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<td>4. What are the most positive aspects of working for ____?</td>
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<td>5. What types of orientation or training do new employees receive?</td>
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<td>6. Are there any opportunities for me to continue my education?</td>
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<td>7. Based on my research, I noticed that this company did over $20 million in sales last year. How do you think the downturn in the economy will effect sales this year?</td>
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<td>8. What are the opportunities for growth and advancement in this department?</td>
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<td>9. How is the company responding to growing competition from ____?</td>
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<td>10. Would you tell me what specific responsibilities I would have in this position?</td>
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Interviewing Skills

In an effort to practice your interviewing skills and recognize different perspectives, do the following:

1. Volunteer for two hours at your local senior citizen community center as well as at your local high school. Before you leave each location, identify a resident of the senior citizen community center and a student from the high school. Please interview each person on the historic election of Barack Obama.

2. Develop a set of open and closed questions for each of the following categories:
   a. The impact of the election on the local community.
   b. The impact of the election on the country.
   c. The impact of the election on the world community.

3. How did this process help you appreciate difference and develop questions for different demographic groups?

SUMMARY

An interview is a planned interaction between two parties in which questions are asked by an interviewer and answers are provided by an interviewee. The interview consists of a variety of questions. Generally, each question can be classified as open or closed, primary or secondary, and neutral or leading. Open questions are designed to give the interviewee maximum latitude in formulating an answer, whereas the purpose of closed questions is to elicit specific feedback. Primary questions focus on the major concerns of the interviewer; secondary questions serve as a follow-up and are designed to gain additional information from the interviewee. Neutral questions reveal nothing of the interviewer's biases, preferences, or expectations; leading questions are designed to move the interview in a specific direction.

The basic structure of an interview is similar to that of a speech: Both have an opening, a body, and a closing. The opening begins the interview and sets the tone for the interaction. The body is the heart of the interview; it is where the questions are asked and the responses are given.

In the closing, the interviewer draws the session to an end, hopefully on a positive note.

Two types of interviews are especially significant: the informational interview and the employment interview. The purpose of an informational interview is to acquire facts about a specific subject. Generally, the most effective way to prepare for this type of interview is to develop an objective, research the topic, and plan the interview questions.

In an employment interview, the interviewer's goal is to uncover pertinent information about potential employees in order to select a qualified candidate; the interviewee's goal is to find out more about the position and to persuade the employer to hire him or her. The employer should be ready to supply information about the vacancy and the company offering the position. Before the interview, applicants should take the time to assess their employment potential, compile a well-structured resume, write a solid cover letter, research the company, and evaluate the interviewer's perspective on the process. There
are specific ways to reduce anxiety and at the same time improve our communication in employment interviews. These skills include active listening, honesty, using direct language, using effective nonverbal communication, and asking questions.

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**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is the difference between a primary and secondary question? Open and closed? Leading and neutral?
2. Explain the three ways to structure the body of an interview.
3. What steps are involved in preparing for an informational interview?
4. Why is it necessary to do a self-assessment?
5. What is the primary goal of a cover letter?
6. What specific communication skills can you use to improve your interviewing effectiveness?

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**KEY CONCEPTS**

- interview
- interviewer
- interviewee
- open questions
- closed questions
- primary questions
- secondary questions
- neutral questions
- leading questions
- opening
- body
- closing
- informational interview
- resume
- cover letter