

TIPS FOR

STRUCTURED

INTERVIEWS



PERSONNEL COMMISSION AT SANTA MONICA COLLEGE

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW STEPS

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Interviews are one of the most common assessments used at Santa Monica College. As a merit system district, Santa Monica College uses structured interviews, in which all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order. Interviews can also be some of the most challenging and anxiety-producing parts of an employment selection process. Here are a few tips that might help you prepare for your upcoming interview.

REVIEW BULLETIN

Always review the job bulletin, which describes the duties of a position and the knowledge/skills that the college is looking for in a successful candidate. Once you have an idea of what the college is looking for in a candidate, you can begin preparing for your interview

PROVE READINESS

The interview raters will evaluate your preparation for a position based **only** on what you provide during the interview. The raters will NOT assume that you possess a set of knowledge or skills, just because it is on your application. You must prove to the raters that you are truly the best qualified person to do this job. Many interview questions will ask candidates to describe “what was the situation”, “what did you do to address the situation”, and “what was the result”. In these cases, one of the best ways to prove your readiness for the job is by providing detailed, specific examples of tasks that you have performed, which highlight your expertise/skill in a given area. To highlight this point, examples of a strong interview response and a weak interview response are provided below.

"Please tell us about a time when you provided outstanding service to a client or customer. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the result?"

Sample Strong Response

When I was working as a Cashier at ABC Company, there was a customer who wanted to use a discount coupon, but forgot it at home. She told me which coupon it was, and I knew we were offering that specific deal; unfortunately, store policy says that we cannot offer a discount unless the customer actually has the coupon on hand. I was planning to buy something that day and happened to have a coupon with me, so I gave my coupon to the customer. She was very thankful, and even spoke to my manager about how appreciative she was.

Sample Weak Response

I've been in the customer service field a long time, and there are a lot of times when I've been complimented on my customer service. I just try to be as helpful as I can, and if there's something that I can do to make someone happy, I do it. There have been many times when I've pushed a cart to someone's car or done other things to help out my customers. Everyone at work thinks I'm one of the best customer service representatives in our company.

When reviewing the two responses above, you can see that the strong response is detailed, provides a comprehensive description of a specific customer service situation, what they did, and what the result was; additionally, even though the strong response was detailed, it was brief and did not include irrelevant information. In contrast, the weak response was generic, and did not provide specific information about what the situation was, what the candidate did to provide customer service, and what the result was. The candidate seems to be willing to provide customer service, but wasn't able to describe a specific example that proves his customer service skills.

PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Coming up with specific examples can be hard, so take the time to think about your past experiences and how they have prepared you for this new job. If you have a resume/journal where you make note of your accomplishments (for example, a customer that was really pleased with your service, or a project that was executed extremely well), review it before the interview.

If you don't regularly keep track of your accomplishments, start to do so. Make sure that you have at least one, but preferably multiple examples which demonstrate your expertise in an area (again, the job bulletin is always a good place to start when trying to identify the knowledge/skills that might be covered in the interview). You don't have to use all examples, but it's better to have more examples than not enough.

Please use this box to note multiple examples that demonstrate your expertise

LIST ACHIEVEMENTS

In most cases, the interview raters are interested in what you have accomplished, and how your background and experiences have prepared you for this position. As such, when responding to the interview questions, focus on the specific things that you have done, even in cases where you worked as part of a group/team.

Avoid using the word “we” (for example, “we completed a very difficult and complex project...”); instead, **use the word “I”**, and focus on the specific tasks or parts of an assignment/project that you handled yourself (for example, “although many people contributed to this project, I was personally responsible for researching and developing...”). Many candidates are reluctant to brag or “toot their own horn” during interviews, for fear of coming across as arrogant or prideful; however, remember that the interview raters expect you to talk about your accomplishments and to sell yourself; YOU are the only person who can show the interview raters that you are ready for this job.

Please use this box to note specific examples of your accomplishments

HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

Other types of interview questions may ask you to describe how you would respond to a fictitious/hypothetical situation (for example, what would you do if a customer started yelling at you because you were unable to give them what they wanted?). In cases like this, it is critical that you provide a specific, detailed description of how you would address the situation; however, you do not need to describe a particular example from your past experience.

Here are some examples of other hypothetical/behavioral questions you can consult in preparation for your interview:

- Tell me about a time you had to make a quick decision.
- Tell me about a time you had too many things to do and had to prioritize.
- What did you do the last time things didn't go according to plan?
- Tell me about a situation where you failed. Why did you fail and what did you learn from it?
- Tell me about a time you had to work with someone who did things very differently from you.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult client or coworker.
- Describe a situation where your efforts had a direct impact on the outcome.
- Tell me about an ethical work situation you had to deal with. How did it turn out?
- What have you done in the workforce that shows initiative and creativity?

PRACTICE

Practice interviewing with a friend, coworker, or family member. The process of being interviewed can be stressful, and you might find yourself forgetting information that you want to communicate to the interview raters. As you practice more, you may find yourself becoming more comfortable in an interview setting, which could make communicating your thoughts and examples easier.