

# A Research-Based Sequential Job Interview Training Model

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*This article presents a sequential model for teaching interviewing skills based on research on the job interview. The model integrates objectives of interview training with methods. The model is adaptable to institutions of varying resources.*

In recent years placement services in educational institutions have received increased attention as a needed component of the career guidance process. As Harkness (1976) predicted, the traditional concept of placement services has evolved from primary emphasis on the provision of job listings and interview arrangements to stressing the counseling function with the objective of developing students' career planning and job seeking skills (Zunker, 1981). The emphasis on skill development in placement counseling has evolved together with the growth of developmental approaches to career guidance. Developmental models stress the accomplishment of tasks and the development of skills relevant to specific developmental stages that are essential to career development throughout life. A review of the literature describing placement counseling programs indicates that interviewing skills, in particular, have been receiving increased attention.

Dunnette and Bass (1963) concluded almost 23 years ago that "the personnel interview continues to be the most widely used method for selecting employees despite the fact that it is a costly, inefficient and usually invalid procedure" (p. 117). Mayfield (1964) and Ulrich and Trumbo (1965) reviewed the research on selection interview reliability and validity and concluded that ratings by interviewers were generally unreliable and lacking in validity. Moreover, Galassi and Galassi (1978) noted that "applicants' performance during interviews seems to

bear little or no relationship to job performance" (p. 188). Despite these findings, the research literature in personnel and industrial psychology suggests that interviews will continue to be one of the most important and frequently used methods in the selection process. Consequently, counseling professionals must be prepared to assist students in developing essential and effective interviewing skills.

Galassi and Galassi (1978) recently conducted a thorough review of the literature on the employment interview. They described research findings regarding four major areas: (a) characteristics of the interview process, (b) content and decision criteria of the interview, (c) factors affecting interview decisions, and (d) training methods. This article summarizes and expands upon their research and presents a specific methodological and sequential model for interview training that will be useful to institutions with varying resources.

## RESEARCH ON THE JOB INTERVIEW

### Characteristics of the Interview

Research on the interview process suggests that:

1. The average college recruitment interview lasts approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and accept or reject decisions are made early in the interview.
2. Patterned or structured interviews, in which the interviewer follows an established format or outline, are used most frequently in the selection process (Mitchell, 1978).
3. The use of a structured outline is designed to improve the validity and reliability of the interview as a selection tool

(Latham, Saari, Pursell, & Campion, 1980).

4. Interviewer styles will vary: some interviewers will dominate the interview time with information about the job and organization; others will focus on questioning the applicant.

### Interview Content and Decision Criteria

Research on the content of the interview indicates generally that most interviewers will structure their questions to evaluate the applicants' (a) qualifications for a particular job, (b) projected performance and achievement, (c) interpersonal relationships, and (d) personal character (Hariton, 1970; Zunker, 1981). Specifically, interviewers tend to be most interested in applicants' communication skills, other specific job-related abilities and skills, knowledge of career goals, previous work experience, and education. Numerous studies have indicated that skill in communication is the most important factor in evaluating candidates in the employment interview. Greenberg and Tully (1976) surveyed personnel directors in Indiana and found that communication skills, previous work experience, and impression of personality were the most important criteria when interviewing college graduates for employment.

### Factors Affecting Interview Decisions

A number of factors have been found to influence interview decisions. Initial impression of the candidate, how well the candidate fills the interviewer's preconceived stereotype of a positive applicant, personal attractiveness, negative information, and characteristics of the previous applicant have all been found to affect interview decisions significantly (Carlson, Thayer, Mayfield, & Peterson, 1971; Mayfield & Carlson, 1966; Webster, 1964). In a survey conducted by University of Illinois placement staff, a group of interviewers identified such factors as being too aggressive or conceited, poor diction and grammar, and condemnation of past employers as sources of interviewers' negative impressions about candidates (University of Illinois, 1977). Physical behaviors found by a number of researchers to influence interview decisions positively included eye contact, smiling, head movement, attentive posture, small interpersonal distance, and direct body orientation (Gal-

assi & Galassi, 1978; Young, Beier, & Beier, 1979).

### Interview Training

Research on interview training supports the use of a combination of behavioral, modeling, and discussion methods for developing interview skills. After reviewing the research on interview training methods, Galassi and Galassi (1978) concluded that training programs should be comprehensive and should integrate several techniques. Specific training methods found to be effective in interview training include lecture and discussion, modeling with live models and with audiotape or videotape, behavior rehearsal, and role playing with and without videotaping.

### THE SEQUENTIAL INTERVIEW TRAINING MODEL (SIT-MODEL)

Research on the job interview provides a foundation for a sequential training model that specifies and integrates training objectives and methods for accomplishing them. Such a model should be flexible enough to be adopted by institutions of varying resources.

Table 1 shows a three-component sequential model with specified training objectives and methods. The model is a general one, designed so that readers who wish to use it may selectively determine which aspects of each component to include or emphasize in their training programs.

#### Component 1: Information

In the information component of the model, students are presented with the information they need to effectively prepare for and conduct interviews. Specifically, students are provided what Galassi and Galassi (1978) have termed "realistic expectations" about the job interview. They are given information about typical interview characteristics, content, the types of questions to expect, typical selection criteria, and related influencing factors.

A second objective of this component is to assist students in establishing their own preparation objectives. Students need to be aware of the specific steps that should be taken in the preparation process. For example, a review of the research on interview content and selection criteria suggests that students should be familiar

**TABLE 1**  
**A Sequential Interview Training Model**

Information	→	Introspective and self-preparation	→	Behavioral
<b>Objectives</b>				
Realistic expectations		Self-awareness		Verbal communication skills
Information needs		Goal clarification		Nonverbal interview behaviors
Preparation objectives		Interview objectives		
Assertiveness		Job/organization information		
Difficult and illegal questions		Communication practice		
Asking questions		Anxiety management		
Legal rights				
Follow-up procedures				
Rejection shock preparation				
Introduction to component 2				
<b>Methods</b>				
Lecture-discussion		Preparation guides		Role playing
Written guides		Career counseling sources		Audio/videotape feedback
Modeling		Career and organization information		Individual simulation
role playing		resources		Group training
audiovisual		Auto-rehearsal		
		Role playing		
		Relaxation training		

with their personal goals and characteristics (e.g., skills, personality traits, aptitudes), knowledgeable about different jobs within their field of interest, and knowledgeable about organizations they plan to interview. Rossi (1980) suggested that students should be trained to establish objectives for each interview. Specific objectives should focus upon how best to relate those personal qualifications, traits, and goals that are most relevant to the requirements of the job and organization.

Not only should students have information about themselves, the position, and the organization; they must also be able to communicate that information clearly. Numerous studies have indicated that skill in communication is one of the most important criteria in interview decisions. Accordingly, students should be aware of the need to practice talking about themselves.

Another important objective of this component is, as Galassi and Galassi (1978) noted, to prepare students for "rejection shock." Students, many of whom will be seeking their first career-related job, need to be aware that being rejected for a job is not uncommon, that they need to be persistent and seek as many interview opportunities as possible, and that they should avoid judging themselves negatively because they are rejected for a job.

Other topics that may be addressed in this component include assertive behavior in the interview, how to deal with difficult or illegal

questions, what questions applicants should and should not ask, applicants' legal rights, and how to follow up the interview.

There are a variety of methods that can be used to familiarize students with the job interview and ways of preparing for it. A combination of lecture-discussion and modeling techniques is probably the most effective and comprehensive method for accomplishing the objectives of this component (Gordon, 1980; Hollandsworth, Dressel, & Stevens, 1977). A lecture presentation provides the greatest amount of factual information in the shortest period of time. Written guides, fact sheets, and outlines can be used to supplement presentations or to inform students unable to attend training. Modeling techniques can be used to familiarize the student with the interview process and to demonstrate specific interview behaviors. Role playing by trainers or interviewers on film, videotape, or audiotape are also effective methods of demonstrating and contrasting positive and negative interview behaviors and can provide the student with a picture of what to expect in the job interview.

#### Component 2: Introspection and Self-Preparation

During the second component of training, students individually seek out the information necessary to increase their self-awareness and to

clarify their career objectives. The primary purpose of this component is to increase students' ability to relate their career goals, personal traits, training, and experience to the requirements of jobs and organizations. The objectives of this component include assisting the student in locating counseling services, career and placement information, and other resources that facilitate self-preparation for job interviews. Some students may require career objectives. Others may need specific information about the specific kinds of jobs and organizations most suitable for their career plans. Still others may need assistance in preparing or practicing for the actual interview experience. At the end of this component the student should be prepared to:

1. State his or her tentative career goals.
2. Summarize career-relevant personal characteristics (e.g., skills, interests, aptitudes, knowledge).
3. Specify goal-relevant jobs that could be sought.
4. Describe the kinds of organizations in which goal-relevant jobs might exist.
5. Identify specific interview objectives for different types of positions sought (e.g., those personal goals, characteristics, and assets that should be promoted or "sold" in the interview).
6. Conduct a role-play interview for a simulated position.

The rationale for a self-preparation component is that students who are aware of how their career goals and personal traits relate to the requirements of a position and organization are better prepared to sell themselves to an employer.

A number of steps can be taken by trainers to facilitate completion of the second component. First, students should be provided with a written guide indicating the information that should be gathered before the third training stage. The Interview Self-Preparation Guide presents a list of some of the questions that might be included in such a guide.

#### Interview Self-Preparation Guide

1. What are my current short-term career goals in terms of specific occupations?
2. What are my tentative long-term (5-year) career goals?
3. What is my educational background? What skills have I developed and what training

have I received that is relevant to my career goals?

4. What are my work experiences? What skills did I use in my previous experiences that are relevant to jobs I wish to pursue now?
5. What are my personal skills and abilities? What are specific examples of how I have used these skills?
6. What accomplishments in school or past work experiences am I most proud of?
7. What are some examples of companies or organizations that have the kind of jobs I wish to pursue?
8. What information do I have concerning the type of job I would like to pursue?
9. What information do I have concerning a company with which I may interview?
10. Regarding one possible job and organization, answer the following questions:
  - a. What interested me in the job and organization?
  - b. What are the most important points about my background that I want to communicate in this interview?
  - c. What additional information do I want the interviewer to be aware of?
  - d. What difficult questions do I anticipate?
  - e. Have I thoroughly researched this organization?
  - f. What are some questions I may wish to ask of the interviewer?

Second, information about career counseling services, career information resources, and organizational information resources on campus should be made available. (Campus placement offices and reference libraries often maintain resources for company and organizational information.)

Finally, students may be encouraged to practice communicating and relating the information they have gathered through auto-rehearsal or role playing. In auto-rehearsal, the student selects topics and poses questions that might be discussed in a job interview. Next, the student practices responding into a tape recorder. The purpose is not to memorize potential answers, but rather to get used to organizing and verbalizing personal goals and information in the interview situation. In role playing, students can practice the effective interviewing behaviors discussed during the first training component, and their partners can provide constructive crit-

icism and feedback about their performance. A list of frequently asked questions (Endicott, 1975) and a checklist of effective interview behaviors can facilitate role playing. Table 2 presents a sample checklist of effective interview behaviors.

Many students experience considerable anxiety in the interview situation. It is our belief that interview anxiety is most effectively reduced by thorough preparation for interviews. Relaxation training may also prove beneficial for students suffering from interview anxiety. Information about relaxation training or anxiety management should be made available.

Because the second component requires individual work, sufficient time between the first and third components should be allowed so students can complete their research. A 2-week period should be sufficient. Notices reminding participants of the date, time, and place of the third component session can be mailed to maximize continuity and retention in the program.

### Component 3: Behavioral

The objective of the behavioral component is to teach specific verbal and nonverbal interview behaviors. During this part of the training, a job interview or segments of an interview are simulated with the student playing the interviewee and the trainer playing the interviewer. During the simulated interview the trainer provides the student with coaching and feedback about positive and negative interview behaviors. This component is the culmination of the interview training and should be geared toward integrating the information developed in the previous training sessions into actual interview practice. Best results will be obtained when the student provides the trainer with some specific information about the type of job and organization for which he or she would like to interview. Questions for the simulated interviews can be derived from questions frequently asked during job interviews (Endicott, 1975) and from the focus of the interview content and selection criteria. Generally

**TABLE 2**  
**Practice Interview Feedback Checklist**

Item	Good	Adequate	Needs improvement
<b>A. Communication</b>			
1. Appears relaxed	_____	_____	_____
2. Maintains good eye contact	_____	_____	_____
3. Appropriate posture	_____	_____	_____
4. Voice level and projection	_____	_____	_____
5. Takes initiative in giving information	_____	_____	_____
6. Communicates interest and enthusiasm	_____	_____	_____
7. Avoids negative self-reference	_____	_____	_____
8. Avoids negative reference to others	_____	_____	_____
9. Preparation and organization	_____	_____	_____
<b>B. Self-knowledge</b>			
1. Clearly specifies goals	_____	_____	_____
2. Describes specific skills	_____	_____	_____
3. Clearly summarizes relevant experiences and training	_____	_____	_____
4. Relates background to position and organization	_____	_____	_____
<b>C. Knowledge of organization</b>			
1. Demonstrates knowledge of position	_____	_____	_____
2. Demonstrates knowledge of organization	_____	_____	_____
3. Gives specific reason for interest in position and organization	_____	_____	_____
4. Relates goals to position and organization	_____	_____	_____
<b>D. Conclusion of the interview</b>			
1. Questions communicate interest and knowledge of job and organization	_____	_____	_____
2. Questions elicit useful information	_____	_____	_____
3. Takes opportunity to summarize	_____	_____	_____

the focus of the exercise should be on relating personal information (goals, training, skills, and experience) to information about the job and organization.

Role playing with or without audiotape or videotape assistance can be used in the simulations. If audiotape or videotape is used, specific segments of the interview can be replayed and analyzed to afford greater flexibility of training.

The third training component can be conducted by individual appointment or in groups. Individual interviews permit completion of a full interview and more individual attention to specific aspects of performance. Individual appointments, however, are extremely time consuming for a small or heavily taxed staff. Group training provides the benefit of group discussion and is more economical.

## CONCLUSION

For most students, conducting an effective job interview requires extensive preparation and practice. Thorough preparation will improve the student's ability to communicate clearly and effectively during the interview, and it will help reduce anxiety. The SIT training model is designed to teach the student how to prepare for the interview. The model is flexible: the specific objectives and procedures in each component can be selected and implemented to fit into many different training programs. It is developmental: effective career planning, including increased self-awareness and the identification of goals, is emphasized as a vital prerequisite to the development of interviewing skills. Finally, the model is sequential: each component of training is based upon the previous training component.

The interview should not be an adversary relationship between the interviewer and the applicant. Rather, it should be a cooperative endeavor toward a mutual objective: to select the employee or organization most suitable to the needs of each party. It is suggested that the best selection an organization can make is that candidate who (a) best meets the needs of the organization and (b) finds the organization most suitable to his or her career needs. If employers can learn to be effective interviewers, that is, to identify and evaluate those criteria most relevant to effective job performance, and to relate the organization to the needs of the applicant, chances for positive matches are increased. If at the same time students can be trained to relate

effectively their relevant attributes to the needs of the organization and to evaluate organizations in terms of their needs and goals, then the chances for positive matches are even more greatly increased.

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