Interview Skills 101

CSMLS spoke to multiple hiring and laboratory managers across Canada to get a sense of what employers are looking for during an interview. Below are some tips to help you stand out at that interview and land your dream job. After all, you only get one chance to make a first impression!

Remember that an interview is a two-way process: you need to see if the company is a good fit for you just as much as they need to see you as a fit for the company.

Preparing

* Being nervous is okay; take deep breaths and consider exercising beforehand.
* Review the job posting.
* Determine potential questions that might be asked and draft answers.
* Have a friend or family member practice mock interviews with you.
* Research the position and the company.
* Write down questions you want to ask and bring them with you.
* Dress professionally – business casual is acceptable.
* Be presentable, unwrinkled, well groomed and practice good hygiene.
* Be comfortable in what you’re wearing; don’t fuss with your attire.
* Avoid wearing running shoes, track pants, hoodies, etc.

What to Bring

* Notepad and pen.
* Bottle of water to help combat dry mouth from nervousness.
* Extra copies of your résumé (for the interviewer and yourself).
* References; after the interview is typically when the employer will ask.
* Samples of previous work that highlight your skills.
* Documentation on research you did on the company so you can refer to it.

During the Interview

* Avoid one-word sentences.
* Use verbiage from the job posting in responses and align your skills with the role.
* Give a firm handshake and a warm smile at the start and end of an interview.
* Wait for direction on where to sit; they may have a designated spot for the candidate.
* Be polite and use your manners.
* Be cautious when using negative terms; try to be positive.
* Don’t criticize your current/previous employer.
* Be yourself and think before answering questions (interviewers expect a pause between question and answer).
* Listen to questions carefully to ensure you properly answer the question.
* Take notes; when you are weighing job offers, you’ll have all the specifics to refer to.
* Let the interviewer know if you are unsure of an answer; this makes you stand out as honest and straightforward.

Questions for the Interviewer

* Come prepared with questions for the interviewer; this can help inform your decision.
* Ask questions to show the interviewer that you are engaged and understand the role.
* No interviewer is so good that questions aren’t warranted; by not asking any questions, it may appear that you are not interested or haven’t done any research.
* Write down any questions you want to ask so you don’t forget.

Potential Questions to Ask

* Can you describe the culture in three words?
* How would you describe the culture here?
* What are the most important characteristics you are looking for in a candidate (this allows you to add content potentially not covered in the interview)?
* What are your expectations for this role during the first 30 days, 60 days, year?
* What is the typical career path for someone in this role?
* Are there opportunities for professional development? If so, what do those look like?
* Is there anything about my background or résumé that makes you question whether I am a good fit for this role?
* While researching the company, I discovered (fill in the blank). Can you tell me a bit more about this?

After the Interview

* Ask about recruitment timelines at the end of the interview if they haven’t already provided the information.
* Follow up with the interviewer if you haven’t heard one way or the other by that deadline.
* Send a thank you email the day of or day after an interview; it’s not expected, but a courtesy that might make you stand out.