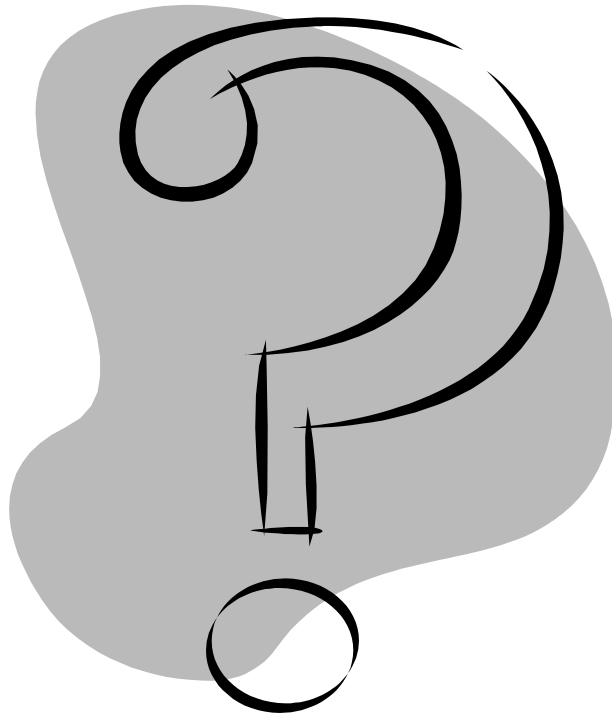




INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES



Johnson County Community College
Career Services Center
SC 252
913.469.3870
www.jccc.edu/careerservices
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Interviewing Guidelines

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INTERVIEWING PREPARATION

WHO, WHAT, WHEN AND WHERE?

When preparing for the interview, it's important to answer these four questions:

- **Who** will be interviewing you? Know the full names and job titles of each person who will be participating in your interview.
- **What** type of interview will you be doing? Whether it's the initial screening interview, a group interview, a behavioral interview or any other type, knowing which will allow you to prepare more effectively.
- **When** will the interview occur? Find out the exact time the interview will begin, of what the interview consists, whether you need to complete a job application on site, and how much time will be allotted for your interview.
- **Where** will the interview take place? Get specific instructions complete with an address, directions on how to get there, and where to park. Arrive twenty minutes before hand.

OVERCOMING INTERVIEW ANXIETY

Nervousness is a sign that the interview is important to you and it is a normal reaction. However, if your nerves get in the way of communicating effectively, here are some tips to help you cope:

1. Treat the interview as a normal part of a business process.
2. Have realistic expectations. Instead of thinking "I want to land my dream job", rephrase it and think "I'm really interested in this position. If it doesn't work out, I'll learn from my mistakes and move on."
3. Research yourself, the position, and the company. If you've done your homework, you have an advantage.
4. Know your worth. Compare the level of the position with your own experience. Do the salary research and find out what realistic expectations you can have for compensation.
5. Practice, practice, practice. Sign up for a mock interview at the Career Services Center (913-469-3870).
6. Eat right, exercise, and try to get a good night's rest before the interview.
7. Allow plenty of time to travel to the interview and arrive 20 minutes early.
8. Normalize your anxiety. Realize that everyone gets nervous in different situations. Give yourself permission to be nervous and try to turn that anxiousness into a positive, motivating factor.
9. Realize that interviewers expect you to be nervous.
10. Practice relaxation techniques.

RESEARCH YOURSELF

Being able to interview effectively depends on your ability to answer the following questions:

- What skills and qualifications do you possess that the employer is seeking?
- What sets you apart from the other people who have the same skills as you?
- What personal qualities make you a successful candidate?

To facilitate your research of self:

1. Create a written inventory of your skills. Use each skill as a heading on a separate piece of paper or computer page.
2. List specific skills and experience you have under each major skill heading.
3. Quantify, whenever possible, the amount of skill you have for each specific skill.
4. Rank/prioritize your major skills and abilities. Specifically, consider which skills and abilities are most needed in the job for which you are applying. The highest ranking skills are the ones you want to be sure you use as emphasize in your interview.
5. Write down your accomplishments. Whenever possible, gather any visual/written evidence of those accomplishments and take them with you to your interview. Consider creating a portfolio or an e-portfolio to use as a visual to sell your accomplishments during the interview. Contact the Career Services Center for more information on portfolios.

RESEARCH THE POSITION

Ask friends, neighbors, networking contacts or anyone you know if he/she knows someone who works at the company. Set up an informational interview with those contacts to ask some pertinent questions. Questions might include:

- What are the positive and negative aspects about this job/career?
- What are the major priorities or responsibilities of the job?
- What current or future projects might this position be involved with?
- What qualifications (both professional and personal) are needed for success in this position and at this company?
- How did the job become available? Is it a new position or was the last person promoted, fired, or did he/she quit?
- What is the salary range for the position?
- What is the advance potential for someone in this position?
- What is the department's turnover rate? Reasons?
- What aspects of the organization are working well?
- What problems need to be solved?
- What is the company culture like? (Include day-to-day work environment, attitudes of management & employees, management/corporate philosophies or mission, etc.)

Obtain a copy of the job description or job listing. What are the key responsibilities and skills, both required and preferred, for this position?

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

Refer to the separate handout on Company Research.

What information do you need to know about the company?

- What are the company's major products and services? What are the new products and services?
- Who are the company's clients or target markets?
- Who are the officers of the company? What are their backgrounds?
- Who are the company's competitors?
- What is the company's position in the market? (#1, #20, nearing bankruptcy, etc.)
- What are some of the company's recent projects, successes, new accounts, marketing/media events or campaigns, etc.?
- What problems/issues is the company facing?
- What is the company culture?
- How large is the company (in employees, sales, etc.)?
- What does the company's financial picture look like? Declines/growth in recent years?
- Is the company hiring or laying off people overall?
- Is the company publicly or privately owned? Is it an independent organization or part of a larger conglomerate?
- What is the turnover rate? What factors contribute to that rate (e.g. pay, benefits, growth, etc.)?

Visit your local library for a wealth of resources to assist you in completing your company research, or research on the Internet, request an Annual Report.

WHAT TO BRING TO THE INTERVIEW

- Several copies of your resume (enough for each individual in the interview to have one)
- A nice pen (invest in a good quality pen – remember that first impressions are important!)
- Your portfolio or e-portfolio
- Your planner
- A list of references

COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

WHAT KIND OF PERSON ARE YOU? HOW DO YOU DIFFER FROM OTHER QUALIFIED CANDIDATES?

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a friend who knows you well would describe you?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What can you do that someone else can't?
- What were the three most important events (decisions) of your life?
- Are you a leader? Give examples.
- What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your field?
- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- How do you handle criticism?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Why have you changed jobs so often?
- Have you ever been fired or laid off?
- Do you prefer working alone or in a team?
- How did you get along with your previous supervisors/co-workers?
- How do you deal with co-workers who disagree with you?
- What business, character and credit references can you give us?
- What kind of manager was your boss?
- What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives?
- What led you to choose your major?
- If you could, how would you plan your academic study differently?
- How does your education relate to the needs of this company?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
- Do you have plans for continued study?
- What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?

- What three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What motivates you to invest greatest effort?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR US?

- Why should I hire you?
- What makes you qualified for this job?
- What two or three things are most important for you in your job?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Do you have an objection to working overtime?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?
- Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in this field?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- How do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- Do you have any samples of your work?

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

- You're over-qualified. Why do you want the job?
- Why did you seek a position with this company?
- What do you know about our company?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- Is there a certain size of company you are targeting? Why?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- In addition to the literature we sent out, what other sources did you use to find out about our company?
- How long do you intend to stay with our company/organization?

CAN WE AFFORD YOU?

- How much do you make?
- What are your salary requirements?

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Laws forbid employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, age, race, national origin, disability or religion. If you are asked an illegal question you have three options.

1. **You are free to answer the question** but risk giving the wrong answer in doing so,
2. **You can ask how question is relevant to the position.**
3. **You can refuse to answer the question** and risk coming off as uncooperative or confrontational, OR
4. **You can examine the intent** behind the question and respond appropriately. For example, if the interviewer asks you who is going to take care of your children when you travel, he or she may be concerned that you won't be able to meet the travel requirements of the job. Simply state that it sounds like there is a concern and would he or she mind sharing that concern with you. Once the concern is conveyed, you can respond by saying, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

EXAMPLES OF ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Issue	Illegal Question	Legal Question
National origin	Are you a U.S. citizen?	Are you authorized to work in the United States?
Ancestry, parentage	Where were you/your parents born? What is your native tongue?	What language do you read/speak/write fluently?
Age	How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
Marital status, dependents	What's your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your child-care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? Would you be able and willing to work overtime?
Religion, political beliefs or affiliations	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?	List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.
Personal appearance	How tall are you? How much do you weigh?	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
Disabilities	Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? What was the date of your last physical exam?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?
Criminal record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of ____? (the crime should be related to the performance on the job)
Affiliations	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

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BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral interviewing is based on the presumption that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Employers look for patterns of behavior and common responses to problems and work situations.

During the interview, answer the questions as specifically and with as much detail as possible. Organize your response in three steps:

- **Problem** – briefly describe the specific problem situation
- **Action** – emphasize steps that you took to solve the problem
- **Result/Outcome** – describe the *positive* result or outcome

LEADERSHIP

- Give me an example of a time when you used facts and reason to persuade another person to take action. Be specific.
- Are you a leader? Give me an example.

ALERTNESS

- Describe the steps you've taken to stay familiar with problem areas in your job.

TOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY

- Sometimes it is necessary to work in unsettled or rapidly changing circumstances. When have you found yourself in this position? Tell me exactly how you handled the situation.

ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

- Time management has become a necessary factor in personal productivity. Give me an example of any time management skill you have learned and applied at work. What resulted from the use of this skill?

ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

- Identify the analytical tools with which you feel competent then give me an example from any time in your working history, which shows your ability to use analytical techniques to define problems or design solutions.
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give an example of when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

DECISION MAKING

- Describe a work problem, which you faced and your method of tackling it.
- Give an example of when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

COMMITMENT TO TASK

- Give me an example of any specific time in which you found it necessary to give long hours to the job; when it was necessary to take home work, work on weekends or maintain usually long hours. Be specific.
- Give an example of an important goal you set and how you reached it.

TEAM-ORIENTED

- We cannot do everything ourselves. Give me an example of a time when you dealt with this reality by creating a special team effort at work. Highlight the special aspects of the situation which best demonstrates your skill in this area.
- What has annoyed you about people with whom you worked in the past?

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

- When have you found it necessary to use detailed checklist/procedures to reduce the potential for error on the job? Be specific.
- Give an example of a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.

VERSATILITY

- Give me an example of how you handled a tense situation at work.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- How do you deal with co-workers who disagree with you?

The top 25 directives most often used in behavioral interviews ...
("101 Proven Time Saving Checklists to Organize and Plan Your Career Search"
by Arlene Hirsch, JIST, 2005)

Tell me about a time when you ...

1. Worked effectively under pressure.
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
3. Used your creativity to solve a problem.
4. Missed an obvious solution to a problem.
5. Were unable to complete a project on time.
6. Persuaded team members to do things your way.
7. Anticipated and averted potential problems.
8. Wrote a report that was well-received.
9. Had to make an important decision with limited information.
10. Were forced to make an unpopular decision.
11. Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
12. Tolerated opinions that were different from your own.
13. Felt disappointed in your own behavior.
14. Used your people skills to get your own way.
15. Had to deal with an irate customer.
16. Delegated an assignment or project that succeeded.
17. Surmounted a difficult obstacle.
18. Set your sights too high or too low.
19. Prioritized a complex project.
20. Won or lost an important contract.
21. Had to fire someone for cause.
22. Made a bad decision.
23. Hired the wrong person.
24. Turned down a good job.
25. Were terminated from a job.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

In general, you need to find out the information that is not available in the company's published recruiting materials or on the company website:

DAILY TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- May I see the job description for this position?
- What tasks will occupy the majority of my time?
- Can you describe a typical day on the job?
- Will I be working on most projects by myself or in a group?
- What are the biggest challenges I'll face in this position?
- Is there a training period?
- How much, if any, overtime is typically required in this position?
- What is the operating budget I'll be handling?
- Based on what I've told you today, do you have any concerns about my ability to succeed in this job?
- I'm very enthusiastic about pursuing this position with you. When and how do we take the next step?

SHORT AND LONG-TERM GOALS:

- What are the three top goals for this position for the coming year?
- How does this position fit with the company's long-term plans?
- What particular initiatives is your department focusing on this year?
- What challenges is this department facing?
- What do you see as the top three goals/objectives for my job?

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

- To whom will I be reporting? How would you describe this person's management style?
- Will I be able to meet the immediate supervisor for this role?
- How many people will I be supervising?
- What is the experience level of the staff I will be managing?
- Will I have the authority to assign duties, reward performance and discipline the staff, or will that be handled by my supervisors?
- Could you explain your organizational structure to me?
- How many employees are in this department?
- How important does upper management consider the functions of this department?

PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS:

- How will my performance be evaluated?

- How is successful performance rewarded?
- Can you tell me about the competencies necessary to perform this job?

COMPANY CULTURE:

- Can you describe an ideal employee?
- Does the company have a generalist or specialist focus?
- What is the preferred management style here?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the job?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the company?
- What made you decide to come to work here?
- Why do people leave?
- What is the company's management philosophy?
- How would you describe the overall work atmosphere?
- If I talked to the employees, what would they tell me about the company?
- What do employees find most and least attractive about working here?
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses as compared to the competition?
- What is the vision of the company?
- Do you prefer that staff keep close contact with you or work very independently?
- I get the sense that the company culture is very team-oriented, quick, and open. Is this an accurate assessment?
- What more can you tell me about the culture and its values, and how culture impacts how people work together?

EFFECTS OF AN UPCOMING LAYOFF, MERGER, ACQUISITION, OR EXPANSION:

- Are any staff increases or reductions planned for this department in the future?
- Does the company plan to expand this department in the future?
- Has the employee turnover rate in the department been higher/lower than average?
- What pending legislation could impact the company?
- What are the major changes in the industry, and how is the company responding?

PROMOTION/GROWTH POTENTIAL:

- Is this a newly created position, or am I replacing someone? Did the person who had the job before fail or succeed, and why?
- What is the typical career path for someone in this job?
- How long do people usually stay in this job?
- What sort of person is likely to succeed here? What sort of person fails?
- What is the company's attitude about advancing people from within?
- What are the best opportunities in your company for new hires?

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

WHAT SHOULD ONE DO WHEN ENDING AN INTERVIEW?

- ❑ Avoid prolonging the interview once the employer signals its completion.
- ❑ Ask appropriate job-related questions.
- ❑ Summarize the key points of the interview. Keep your summary concise and review the most important issues.
- ❑ If a problem came up, repeat your resolution of it. If you sense that an employer has concerns about your qualifications, provide short explanations of why you think you are qualified for the position.
- ❑ Review your strengths for this job. Emphasize only your key strengths.
- ❑ Get a business card from the interviewer. This will allow you to have an address to mail your thank you letter and give you a variety of ways to follow-up with him or her.
- ❑ Thank the interviewer(s) and take initiative to follow up. Let an employer know how and when you will inquire about your candidacy status.
- ❑ Ask about the timeline for hiring. Find out what the process is (e.g. will there be another interview, when does the interviewer hope to make the decision, etc.)
- ❑ State your interest in the company and position.
- ❑ Depart in a polite and assured manner.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Portions of this section adapted from "Phone Interviews for Savvy Candidates", by Hugh Anderson www.careerjournal.com, "How to Survive a Team Interview", by Marlene Caroselli, www.careerjournal.com and "Smart Strategies for Interviewing at Meals", by Taunee Besson, www.careerjournal.com.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews are mostly utilized to:

- Screen potential employees
- Find out if one can communicate in a professional, friendly manner
- Preview individual to invite into the office for a face-to-face interview

Phone interview tips:

- Be prepared by keeping paper and pencil by the phone
- Prepare a few statements about your strengths and qualifications
- Sound positive with a high level of self-confidence
- Focus on what you can offer to the company
- Listen attentively
- Ask about the next step

GROUP/PANEL INTERVIEWS

Group interviews are mostly utilized to:

- Be evaluated by a group of hiring experts
- Be observed by the members of the team with different perspectives

Group interview tips:

- Activate your interpersonal skills and find a way to connect with each interviewer
- Practice with your family and friends prior to the interview
- Prepare to discuss your strengths and qualifications relevant to the specific job requirements
- Maintain eye contact with each member of the panel
- Shake hands with each member of the panel

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

Behavioral interviews are mostly utilized to:

- Elicit information about your performance on the job
- Use descriptions of past behavior as indicator for future behavior
- Ask for specific examples of ways you handled work-related situations in the past to predict your ability to use your analytical skills

Behavioral interview tips:

- Review your resume, your skills and experiences with which you can demonstrate how you used your skills
- Concentrate on measurements of your accomplishments and details of your success

- Recall specific actions and behaviors that address the required skills
 - Use a P-A-R (Problem-Action-Result) approach to describe your accomplishments
-

MEAL INTERVIEWS

Meal interviews are mostly utilized to:

- Get to know potential employees before job offers are extended
- See potential hires in a social setting, evaluate hires' social savvy
- See whether you and the employer would be a good match

Meal interview tips:

- Use your host as a guide when ordering a meal
 - Avoid exotic or hard-to-eat menu choices
 - Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages and smoking
 - Do not accent your dietary preferences (vegetarian, weight-loss...)
 - Prepare questions you would like to ask and stay with your agenda
 - Keep the conversation professional
 - Focus on the job and your relevant qualifications
-

SECOND/FINAL INTERVIEWS

Second or final interviews are mostly utilized to:

- Identify **specific** qualities employer is looking for in a new employee
- Evaluate if an individual fits into the company culture
- Help the interviewee decide if that is the company for which he/she would like to work

Final interview tips:

- Research the employer in detail (find timely articles about the company to review the operations of the organization, products or services, the structure of the company, challenges or improvements that are facing the company)
- Ask questions to help you decide if this is the company and the job opportunity that will make you happy and allow you to accomplish your goals

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

ATTIRE & GROOMING

When dressing for the interview consider the following:

- Culture of the company – some companies are more conservative than others
- Location – big metropolis differs from a small town in dressing style
- Experience – dress according to the type of position you are applying for to show flexibility, adaptability and professionalism

	Males	Females
Hairstyles	Wear stylishly short. Facial hair may be acceptable if it is well groomed.	Conservative styles are preferred. If your hair is longer, pull it back away from your face.
Jewelry	Not preferred; a conservative watch and wedding ring is acceptable.	Keep it simple. Avoid anything that dangles and in general, stay with the basics (conservative earrings, 1-2 rings, watch, and necklace/scarf).
Hosiery/Socks	Wear dark socks the same color as the suit.	Wear nude or a neutral shade that blends well with the color of your suit or shoes.
Cologne/Perfume	No cologne is preferred; avoid strong aftershave scents.	Keep the scent very subtle and spray very lightly.
Hands/Nails	Make sure hands and fingernails are neat and clean.	Short, well-manicured nails are encouraged. Use a clear or subtle shade of polish.
Tattoos/Body Piercing	Conceal all tattoos and remove any visible jewelry from body piercings (other than 1-2 in ears).	Conceal all tattoos and remove any visible jewelry from body piercings (other than 1-2 in ears).
Clothing	Conservative styles of suits, darker colors (black, navy blue, gray)	Conservative styles of suits, darker colors (black, navy blue, gray). Skirt length – no more than 1” above the knees.

BODY LANGUAGE

Portions of this section adapted from "What Your Body Language Tells Interviewers", by Jennifer Rae Atkins. www.wetfeet.com and "Body Language Tactics That Sway Interviewers", by Eugene Raudsepp www.careerjournal.com

- Walk into the office with a self-assured and confident stride
- Greet the interviewer(s) with a firm handshake
- Look the interviewer in the eye but do not stare
- Do not fidget (touch your hair, tap your fingers, play with your jewelry)
- Sit forward in your chair, posture communicates a message
- Smile and exert confidence and friendly attitude

ACTION	IMAGE/MEANING
Crossed arms	closed off or defensive
Fidgeting, running tongue along teeth, playing with hair or jewelry, or tapping feet	nervous or bored
Lack of eye contact or, conversely, staring too intently without breaking a gaze	untrustworthy
Leaning back	uncomfortable
Clasping hands behind the head while leaning back	looking to gain power
Leaning forward	interested in the conversation
Smiling or attempting to be humorous	Friendly
Eye contact with occasional, natural breaks in the stare	focused and curious
Nodding while listening	attentive and alert
Open palms	approachable and trusting
Gesturing with hands while talking	genuinely involved in the conversation

PUNCTUALITY

- Be early and use your time to organize your thoughts
- Being punctual will allow you to relax before the interview and will show an employer that you respect his/her time
- Arriving early will allow for any unpredicted difficulties (finding a parking spot, locating an actual place of the interview)
- Time before the interview can also be used to make the significant contact with the administrative assistant and evaluate the work environment

SPEECH

- Use a natural tone when speaking in an interview
- Use your normal rate and volume of speech
- Make sure that your voice and the way you talk match how you feel
- Show enthusiasm and interest in the company and the job opportunity
- Be honest! It is in the best interest of, both, you and the employer. Only being yourself will allow you to fit into the environment and the company culture

SALARY NEGOTIATION

Portions of this information from 101 Great Answers to the Toughest Job Search Problems by Ollie Stevenson, 1995 and The Quick Interview and Salary Negotiation by J. Michael Farr, 1995.

It is important to negotiate salary and benefits because:

- Employers use the salary information in the interviewing process to eliminate potential employees who are asking for too much money or the one's who lack self-confidence and ask for too little money
- Salary often depends on the level of responsibility that a certain job carries, size of the company, living conditions in the location of the company, education and experience of the jobseeker – so salary offers can vary and should be negotiated
- Sometimes it is not what one makes but what one takes – benefits of working for a certain company and in a certain position can often outweigh the actual earnings

Salary negotiation tips:

- Never discuss your salary requirements before you get a job offer. Do not mention those in the cover letter or any time during the interviewing process
- Avoid stating a salary history or your requirements by delaying your response until the appropriate time
- Research the industry, the size of the company and the position and know what the probable salary range is for the position for which you are applying
- Decide what kind of salary you want and for what you would settle prior to beginning the interviewing process. Know how much you are worth
- Never state an exact salary you would want, give an employer a broad range
- Only discuss your salary requirements with an individual in the company who has the authority to negotiate and make decisions
- Don't say "NO" to the offer before you have evaluated all the benefits this opportunity would offer
- Don't accept the offer immediately even if you are positive that you want the job
- Take 24 hours to consider all advantages and disadvantages of the job opportunity and inform the employer about your decision