

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL GROUP AND PANEL INTERVIEWING

When thinking about the definition of an interview, many people envision a situation where one employer representative interviews one candidate. However, there are many different types of interviews that employers conduct. Group and Panel Interviews are two of those “other” types, and are important to understand because they are used often in the hiring process.

WHAT IS A GROUP INTERVIEW?

A group interview is a special interviewing situation where several candidates interviewing at the same time. It is also known as a “Mass Interview.”

What is the Purpose of a Group Interview?

Employers look for several items in a group interview, including, but not limited to:

- If an individual stands out amongst the crowd
- Communication skills
- Assesses attire, manner, participation, leadership skills/potential, and presentation skills
- Cooperation abilities
- Interaction with others

Strategies for a Group Interview

There are several keys to success when you are participating in a group interview. Perhaps the first and most important one is to ask questions. This improves your chances of a good impression because it makes you stand out from all the others present and enables you to better complete and/or lead a group task.

WHAT IS A PANEL INTERVIEW?

A panel interview is another special interviewing situation where 2 to 5 interviewers are present to interview a candidate. Usually, various types of people in an organization participate, including Human Resources personnel, managers, as well as supervisors and colleagues of the particular position. These individuals can interview a candidate all at once, or one or two at a time for a certain length of time.

What is the Purpose of a Panel Interview?

Employers want to learn:

- How you handle stress under the “firing squad” of rapid questions
- Interaction with potential/future supervisors
- Communication styles with different individuals in different job functions (HR, support staff, supervisors, etc.)
- Communication flexibility
- Rapport-building skills

Strategies for a Panel Interview

In a panel interview, it is often difficult to communicate effectively with 2-5 people all at once. However, you can best communicate by ensuring that you maintain good eye contact with everyone.

- Do this by starting with the speaker, and moving your gaze, pausing briefly on each one. This lets people know that you are speaking to them too, not just the person asking the question.
- Do the reverse as you finish your question, ending your answer with your eyes focused on the questioner. Be ready to scan your eyes quickly to any of the panel members, as you may not know who will ask the next question, or make a comment.
- Be aware of which individual might be your supervisor and pay special attention to them as you make eye contact with everyone.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

There are some special situations that you need to consider when involved in a group or panel interview.

1. Combination of the Two – With many interviewers interviewing many clients. This is cost-effective and convenient for employers, and is utilized often.
2. Group Tests and Performance Tasks – A special situation where a group of interviewees are presented with a case or hypothetical situation/project, etc.
 - May be split into groups, and may be expected to present and/or explain findings/conclusions/rationales, etc. later to the entire larger group.
 - Interviewers may join groups with the interviewees to evaluate them, purposely adding stress to the task, etc.
 - Interviewers may also make notes, eavesdrop, interject, ask questions, and/or add problems to the task.

What are Employers Evaluating in a Group Test/Performance Task?

Again, employers are evaluating each member on:

- Communication – Interpersonal, Different Styles
- Persuasion Techniques
- Improvisation Ability
- Planning and Leadership Skills – Task Delegation, Cooperation, Including Others, etc.
- Constructive Criticism – How one reacts to giving and receiving negative feedback from others
- Conflict Reaction and Resolution Strategies and Abilities

How to Handle a Group Test/Performance Task

Perhaps the first and foremost strategy is to remain calm. Then, follow these guidelines:

- Clarify directions and ask directions if necessary
- Be among the leaders and participate **actively**.
- Avoid overt power conflicts
- Treat everyone with respect
- Remember to both talk and listen to others.

FINALLY...

Be prepared for anything! You may not know in advance that you will be meeting with more than one interviewer and/or interviewing amongst more than one applicant, so stay on your toes and expect surprises. Relax and always adapt yourself to the situation. Be sure to review the “40 Most Commonly Asked Questions Employers Ask” in the Interview Preparation handout available at Career Services. Also, remember that general interview standards do apply as well appropriate dress, manners, punctuality, behavior, and language.