

INTERVIEWING FOR CREATIVE JOBS

EIGHT POINTS TO REMEMBER

Successful interviews with prospective employers are built upon a foundation of thorough preparation. Here are some points to remember.

Analyze Your Strengths + Weaknesses

Begin your interview preparation with an evaluation of your skills and abilities. Analyze your background, academic performance, personal goals, values, and portfolio. Think through not only what you would like to do, but also what you are best prepared to do. Individual counseling appointments with a Career Counselor in the Alumni + Career

Portfolio Preparation

Make certain your portfolio is prepared for a professional presentation. Research and select the most effective presentation methods for your specific discipline. Organize your portfolio for each individual company.

Know Your Employer

Research prospective employers. It is important to know about their products, services, philosophies, policies, and personnel. "Doing your homework" will help build your confidence and assist you in answering and asking questions appropriately.

Anticipate the Employer's Questions

This handout includes some questions employers frequently ask applicants. Study them and practice your responses. It is often helpful to develop a short list of important phrases or information you want to include in your responses, rather than a lengthy "script" that may inhibit your ability to react to the interview situation as it develops.

Ask Questions

Always be prepared to ask questions at an interview, particularly if you're not clear about the details of the job. Insightful and intelligent questions reflect well upon you and indicate your interest in the position.

Remain Positive

Do not volunteer any information about what you perceive are your weaknesses. If the interviewer challenges you on this point, don't side step the issue; answer briefly and non-defensively. Keep the positive aspects of your qualifications in the forefront of your mind and the discussion.

Dress Appropriately

Each field and organization has its own norms for dress and behavior. Dress appropriately for the particular environment and the work for which you are being interviewed. When in doubt, err slightly on the side of what you perceive as "conservative" for the setting.

Follow Up

Send a thank you note/email, and references or transcripts, if requested by the prospective employer, within 48 hours. Attention to these details reinforces your interest in the position and may positively affect how you are evaluated.

WEIGHING YOUR OPTIONS

What to research about the organization:

The Organization Mission

- *What business is it?*
- *What service or products does it provide or produce?*
- *Who are its customers or clients?*
- *Is the company a subsidiary or does it have subsidiaries?*
- *Is the company involved in a growing industry?*
- *Is it a leader or notable in its field?*

The Size of the Organization and its Structure

- *Number of employees?*
- *Any RISD alumni working for the company?*
- *Does it have one location or is it regional, national, or multinational?*
- *What are the trends and current issues in the industry?*

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[HTTP://INTRANET.RISD.EDU/CAREER](http://intranet.risd.edu/career)

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401.454.6614

Business and Environmental Factors Which Could Affect the Organization's Future

- *Natural resources - shortage or surplus.*
- *Scientific or technological changes which may occur.*
- *Foreign or domestic competitors.*
- *Social trends/lifestyles of consumers or workforce.*
- *Financial stability of the firm and its growth potential.*

HOW TO BEGIN:

Online Research

The Internet is a wonderful tool for research. Make sure to check out the company website and pay particular attention to sections such as: About Us, Company Philosophy, Client List, and/or mission statement.

Topical Issues

Periodicals and industry trade journals are an excellent resource for information on specific industries or companies. Virtually every field has useful directories that provide information about the industry. Many trade directories and periodicals are available in the Alumni + Career Services Office.

Direct Contact with the Organization's People

"Information interviews" are the best way to gather data and get a glimpse into the industry or field you are researching. While not usually appropriate for a company which you will be applying, this should be an essential part of every student's career exploration and development.

PORTFOLIO PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION

The quality of your work, as reflected in your portfolio, is a key factor in getting the job you want. When you are ready to begin assembling your portfolio, you face some important decisions: what to include and how to present it. The faculty in your department and the Counselors in Career Services are resources for this process and can provide suggestions. It is impossible to outline here all the possibilities for preparation and presentation. Each professional area has its own norms and standards. You should investigate those standards by looking at the portfolios of professionals in your career area. The alumni subfolders in the Online Career Library: <http://intranet.risd.edu/alumni/redirect.asp> are wonderful resources that can give you a better sense of portfolio presentation options and solutions.

General Guidelines

- *Being neat is essential; artwork should be free of smudges, erasures, and any other distracting information.*
- *Sequence your work carefully; start strong and finish*

strong.

- *Sequence your work logically.*

• *Only include those pieces that you feel are your best work and are appropriate to the kind of job for which you are applying. This may mean that you have to change your portfolio for different kinds of interviews and prospective employers.*

• *You will have to make some decisions about the focus of your portfolio. You may want to show the breadth of your talent and your ability to do many different things or you may want to focus your portfolio in a specialized area. These decisions will be determined by your chosen field and the specific kind of work for which you are applying. As a general rule, your portfolio should communicate what your real talents are and where your primary interests lie.*

• *Be prepared to talk about your work and have comments for all your pieces.*

• *The portfolio itself should be as light and easy to manage as possible. It's no fun to lug a heavy portfolio around New York City for a whole day's appointments. Remember that you may be riding subways and buses during crowded rush hours. Cumbersome and heavy portfolios can undermine your ambition to see as many people as possible.*

• *Leaving your portfolio with someone can be potentially risky or rewarding. Despite the horror stories about lost or stolen work, "drop offs" may be the only way you can show your work. Use your instincts to determine if you can trust the person and if leaving the work will be of additional benefit. One of the purposes of making an appointment is to ensure that you and your portfolio can be seen together.*

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Remain Positive

An interviewer wants to learn not only about your skills, but also about your character. It is important to keep your responses, and the interview in general, upbeat and positive. Very often, interviewers will ask a question that seems to require you to be negative or critical, but you can turn the questions around so it can be answered positively.

Part of what employers are looking for are people who can think under pressure. The interview is an opportunity to prove you can do this.

What is your greatest weakness as a designer?

“I really love my work and am totally committed to producing superior products. So, if I’m working with others who I feel are not pulling their weight I can get a little frustrated. I try to stay aware of this and overcome it with a positive attitude that I hope will catch on.”

It seems like it's taking you quite a while to find your first job.

“When I graduated from RISD, I decided that I wanted to be very careful about where I began my career. I care about my field and am looking for more than just a paycheck. I’m confident that when I find the right organization I will make a solid contribution.”

Employers are like everyone else - they want to hire and be around enthusiastic, happy, motivated people. It is important to feel confident and relaxed. Practice interviewing can help you feel comfortable and ensure that you are making the best impression possible without being insincere.

Body Language

Most studies have concluded that 60-70% of all communication is non-verbal. Be aware of how concepts, feelings, and attitudes can be expressed visually. Use your skills to interpret the interviewer’s body language. Good eye contact and a firm handshake are only part of successful body communication. Posture, tone of voice, facial expressions, and hand movements also play an integral role.

Dressing for Success

Wear clothing that fits well and in which you feel comfortable. It is better to err on the side of formality than informality. Dress appropriately for the industry and only slightly better than the people in the field do on a day-to-day basis. As an artist or designer, neatness and professionalism in personal appearance is a strong complement to the quality of your work. There will be plenty of time to express your individuality once you get the job.

ANSWERING THEIR QUESTIONS

The following is a list of questions that are frequently asked during employment interviews. Although it is unlikely you would be asked this many questions, you should be prepared to answer all the questions; practice by outlining your answers or preparing some notes.

- *Why did you choose to attend RISD?*
- *What led you to choose your major field of study?*
- *What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?*
- *How do you feel about your work being changed or modified?*
- *Can you work under pressure?*

- *Who was the worst person you ever worked for and why?*
- *Why are you interested in this position?*
- *Why are you interested in this firm?*
- *What is the greatest challenge you have had to face? How did you handle the situation?*
- *What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?*
- *What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?*
- *What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?*
- *Is graduate education in your future plans? When?*
- *What are you most proud of about yourself?*
- *Tell me a little about yourself.*
- *Do you prefer to work alone or in a group?*
- *How do you feel about working in a team setting?*
- *What else should I know about you?*
- *I see many students with credentials similar to yours. Why should I hire you?*

Remember that you are being evaluated throughout the interview process and especially during “casual” conversations, lunches, etc. Federal laws, and some state laws, as well, restrict interviewers and require them to ask only questions that pertain to the job requirements. Inquiries about race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, and other matters not directly connected to job performance are not valid topics.

ASKING YOUR QUESTIONS

Interviewers expect candidates to ask questions about issues related to their potential employment. Asking questions serves two purposes: first, clarifying issues or concerns you may have related to your potential employment, and second, conveying your interest in the position. Questions should never be gratuitous, but if you are really interested in a position, you can always think of something more that you would like to know about it. Since it is sometimes difficult to think on the spot, it is best to compose at least a few questions before the interview.

- *As I gain more experience, what opportunities might be available to me?*
- *Can you give me a little more detail regarding my specific job responsibilities?*
- *What do you think is the most challenging aspect of the job?*
- *Who would be my direct supervisor? How is the supervision done?*
- *What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?*
- *What will my work environment be like?*
- *What kind of projects or new products do you see the company becoming involved with in the next few years?*
- *How will this position allow me to use my initiative and develop my skills?*

Always remember to ask the critical questions. Inexperienced workers or students who have not held a job may forget to confirm their salary, starting date, and benefits. Be wary of employers who attempt to embroil you in the excitement of your new position, yet only sketch out the details of your compensation package.

Following Up

After an interview, send a thank you note/email, as well as any additional materials the employer has requested, within 48 hours. Keep it short and sincere. The follow-up serves several purposes:

- *It provides the opportunity for further visibility.*
- *It gives you the opportunity to briefly remind the interviewer of your strengths and genuine interest in the position.*
- *It demonstrates that you are a thoughtful person who values the interviewer's time.*

SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

Determining what your salary will be in a new position is an area of great interest to both you and your prospective employer. It is also, frequently, a topic of high anxiety for both negotiating parties, although usually more so for the person being interviewed. Even small differences in hourly or weekly pay can add up over the course of a year. Here are some basic guidelines for salary negotiation.

Wait Until You Are Made An Offer

Don't bring up the issue of compensation during the interview. The interview is about your potential to perform the job well. You will want to make sure the interviewer has an objective opportunity to realize that you would be an excellent choice before you discuss your requirements with regard to salary and benefits. If the job notice asks for a resume and salary history, send the resume, not the history. You won't lose the opportunity for the interview if your resume and cover letter are effective.

Never Go First

If the interviewer directly or indirectly confirms that the firm is interested in hiring you, he or she will probably ask what kind of salary you are looking for. If you go first, you risk losing the job because your figure is much too high, or you risk losing money if your figure is lower than what the employer would have been willing to pay. Counter by asking what salary range the firm has allocated for the position. It is not your job to figure out how much a job is worth to the employer, so try to avoid naming an amount while being as diplomatic as possible.

First Response

This is where negotiation begins. When they suggest a salary

(often a salary range), repeat the top figure given. Then be quiet. Your silence indicates that you're not satisfied, and may prompt a second, higher figure, without saying anything. In order to negotiate effectively, you must have a clear sense of how much money you NEED to make. Know your bottom line - how much money it will take to pay your expenses (rent, food, transportation, other bills). Know the figures on an hourly, weekly, and yearly basis.

Counter Their Offer

If their offer is too low, suggest a higher figure. To be effective in this, you must have done some research to establish what others in similar positions, in similar companies, actually earn. Again, you must balance this with your bottom line, and how badly you want that particular job. Even if you cannot come to an acceptable agreement at this time, avoid saying no immediately. Give yourself some time to consider the offer in greater detail, and allow them to perhaps make a better offer.

Accept the Offer - Not the Job

Salary is only part of the compensation. Don't accept the position until you determine what other benefits will be included, such as medical/dental insurance, vacation time, sick days, bonuses, or even relocation expenses. Given the high cost of medical insurance, and other benefits, do not relax until all the details are clearly stated, and acceptable by you. While some larger companies have a fixed non-negotiable package, smaller companies often make individual arrangements, and you may be able to improve your benefits through skillful negotiating.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW SKILL BUILDING RESOURCES

General Tips

CreativePro

www.creativepro.com/business/resources#interviewing

Questions to Ask the Interviewer (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/questionstoask>

Preparation, Presentation + PERSISTENCE (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/sweat>

Research, Rehearse + Relax (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/rrr>

Tough Interview Questions (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/questions/>

Telephone Tips

Conversation Script + Phone Strategies (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/telephonetips>

Phone Strategies (Monster.com)

<http://my.flame.monster.com/tools/phonestrategies>

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