

INTERVIEW TO WIN YOUR FIRST JOB

ACTIONBOOK

For use with the Interview to Win Your First Job video available in VHS or DVD from JIST Publishing

This interactive booklet will help you explore job interests and develop a better understanding of your skills. Take action to prepare for your interviews and get the job you want.

Robert F. Wilson

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INTRODUCTION

Interview to Win Your First Job is an instructional videotape produced to help recent college graduates search effectively for their first permanent, full-time jobs. It was written not only for students from four-year colleges and universities, but for those from technical and community colleges and schools as well.

The opening scenes of *Interview to Win Your First Job* depict a group of college seniors discussing their hopes and anxieties about entering the world of work. Their unscripted, spontaneous concerns are then addressed through a series of simulated, before/after interviews. Other job search topics dealt with in the video include:

- Career direction
- Developing marketing plans
- Writing powerful résumés and cover letters

At the end of the *Actionbook* a bibliography of source books facilitates viewer research for a variety of job-search and related topics.

Interview to Win Your First Job can be used effectively by both individual job seekers and by counselors or instructors in the classroom situation. Individuals obviously can proceed at their own pace and complete both the viewing and the *Actionbook* exercises in one- or two-hour sessions over a week or more. Those of you conducting job search classes or seminars will be able to tailor your specific needs and interests, utilizing not only *Interview to Win Your First Job*, but other resources that will help attain your objectives.

Viewers will get the most out of this video by stopping the tape to complete applicable exercises where appropriate (see *Actionbook Table of Contents*), and replaying those scenes that warrant it. Counselors or instructors may want to build in additional discussion time for each section.

THE FOUR PARTS OF A JOB INTERVIEW

To show you the organization of the program at a single glance, all of the major points made in the videotape are printed below in their on-screen sequence.

1. Make the best first impression
 - a. Research the company, the job, and the boss
 - b. Dress appropriately, arrive early
 - c. Maintain a positive attitude
 - d. Look for ways to strengthen your candidacy
2. Get a definition of the ideal candidate
 - a. Listen attentively
 - b. Ask illuminating questions
 - c. Prepare questions beforehand
 - d. Take notes as necessary
 - e. Emphasize your job-related strengths
3. Determine whether you want the job
 - a. Find out why the job is available
 - b. Find out what you would have to change about yourself
 - c. Decide what you require from the company
4. Work to get a job offer—or at least a second interview
 - a. Neutralize any soft spots in your candidacy
 - b. Find out where you stand with other candidates
 - c. Elevate your candidacy by any means possible
 - d. Reaffirm your interest in the job

I. A Career Search Agenda—Before Your First Interview

Exercise 1:

Job Choice Pluses and Minuses

Use this exercise to take a close look at what was good and what was bad about your previous part-time or summer jobs. Think in terms of activities, skills, responsibilities, or contact with people and the environment.

What I Liked

Position: (The job itself) _____

Function: (The type of work, e.g., accounting)

Company: _____

Industry: _____

Other: _____

What I Didn't Like

Position: (The job itself) _____

Function: (The type of work, e.g., accounting)

Company: _____

Industry: _____

Other: _____

Now, using what you have just written and any further thoughts you may have, complete the statements below.

At work I need: _____

I am interested in: _____

I excel at: _____

I don't do well at: _____

I like to: _____

I don't like to: _____

8 I. A Career Search Agenda

I try to avoid: _____

I value: _____

Now, read over your answers and think about them.

In summary, what I've learned from this exercise about my previous jobs is: _____

What I've learned from this exercise that may help in my next job is: _____

Exercise 2:

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” To both test this cliché and set up your own network, answer the following questions:

Setting Up a Network

Who do you know who is employed by a company you might want to work for?

Who do you know who does the kind of work you want to be hired to do?

Who do you know who seems to be well connected?

Who do you know (even slightly) from family or college associates?

Who do you know from a part-time or summer job who would be willing to put you in touch with others?

Who else did you come into contact with in a part-time or summer job who might have leads (e.g., suppliers or customers)?

Who do you know from school or alumni associations who might have contacts or be good contacts themselves?

Who in your extended family might be of help?

The idea in networking is to get those you contact initially to refer you to others. Whether you come up with five names or fifty, the number of your contacts will grow as you ask each person you approach for the names of two or three others you might talk to.

A contact interview, whether in person or on the phone, should be viewed as an opportunity to promote your skills and accomplishments.

Most people are flattered when you ask their advice, and most people get satisfaction from helping others. So there’s no reason to feel uncomfortable about setting up your network and using it.

John A. Ellis

Florida State University, Box 421
Tallahassee, FL 02145
(218) 555-3214

L197 Walden Circle
Orlando, FL 02185
(218) 555-9875
jaellis@jae.com

Objective: To obtain a position in Corporate Finance

Education: Florida State University
Bachelor of Science
Majors: Economics and Finance

Tallahassee, FL
May, 20XX
GPA 3.0

Achievements: Elected Blue Key National Honor Society member, Spring 20XX
Financed 50% of college tuition and 100% of educational expenses

Experience: Theta Chi Fraternity, President, 20XX Florida State University

- Developed interpersonal, organizational, and leadership skills
- Planned and presided over all chapter meetings
- Interacted regularly with administrators and student government officials
- Educated and prepared pledges for leadership on campus and in society
- Negotiated and implemented fiscal budget for eight executive officers
- Awarded scholarship to Chapter Leadership Conference, Chapel Hill, NC
- Achieved \$5,000 goal for three annual charities, United Way, Oxfam, and the Red Cross
- Dedicated more than 20 hours per week

Tallahassee Bank of Commerce
Consultant Tallahassee, FL
Fall 20XX

- Analyzed and recommended feasibility of new branch for \$57M bank with the MCFE group
- Developed industry outlook through research at Federal Reserve
- Performed financial forecasts and break-even analysis for proposed branch
- Analyzed current financial condition to support decision
- Formulated competitive strategy and presented proposal to bank officials
- Utilized and strengthened quantitative and qualitative skills

“It’s About Time”
Store Manager/Founder Provincetown, MA
Summers, 20XX-XX

- Managed all aspects of retail watch store
- Designed financial record-keeping to monitor cash and credit accounts
- Improved 1500-unit merchandise supply
- Increased sales more than 24% above last year’s totals
- Formulated and implemented innovative marketing strategy to outperform competition
- Motivated, trained, and supervised staff to meet daily and weekly sales goals
- Dedicated more than 70 hours per week

Florida State University
Resident Assistant Tallahassee, FL
Sept. 20XX-present

- Advised 80 residents on academic, social, and personal issues
- Promoted student development and campus involvement
- Fostered a greater understanding of community and student diversity
- Enforced college policies and encouraged student responsibility
- Planned and initiated social and academic programs
- Acted as liaison between college administration and students

Technology Skills: Excel, Word, Quark

Personal: Enjoy skiing, golf, tennis, and travel

KARA SIOBHAN KENNEDY

418 Spring Road
 Batavia, IL 60130
 (708) 555-5667
 ksioken@ksk.com

CAREER OBJECTIVE To obtain an entry-level position in the social services field which will enable me to utilize my sociology knowledge and experience.

EDUCATION
 20XX-XX

Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio
 Bachelor of Arts, May, 20XX
 • Major: Sociology/Anthropology
 • Minor: History
 • GPA: 3.16/4.0
 • Major GPA: 3.5/4.0
 Summer, 20XX Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland

EXPERIENCE
 Summer, 20XX

Family Services, Aurora Superior Court, Aurora, IL
 Judicial Intern, State of Illinois Judicial Department
 • Worked closely with Family Services counselors throughout the judicial process
 • Managed a caseload of direct client services and participated in mediation
 • Processed domestic violence cases

Summer, 20XX

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland
 Semester in Ireland
 • Studied Irish families compared to American families
 • Studied gender roles and relations in Irish culture

Summer, 20XX

Morse Moving, North American Van Lines, Geneva, IL
 • Organized and arranged customers' belongings for moving
 • Established and maintained rapport with customers

Summer, 20XX

Xerographics, St. Charles, IL
 Operations Assistant
 • Prepared duplications of customers' documents
 • Established pricing and credit for customer services

ACTIVITIES
 20XX-20XX

Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity, Yellow Springs, OH
 • Purchasing Officer
 • Standards Committee

HONORS

20XX-20XX

National Dean's List recipient
 Alpha Kappa Delta (Sociology Honor Society)
 Phi Alpha Theta (History Honor Society)
 Pan Hellenic recipient for Merit Scholarship

REFERENCES

Furnished upon request from the Antioch Career Planning and Placement Office, 324 Hamilton Williams Center, Yellow Springs, OH 43049, Tel: (614) 555-3165

February 19, 20XX

Mr. Lawrence Allenson
Senior Recruiter
Boston Factors of Canada, Inc.
500 Rene Levesque, Ste. 1400
Montreal, PQ H2Z 1W7, Canada

Dear Mr. Allenson:

The financial analyst position open at Boston Factors of Canada is one of extreme interest to me, and one I believe I can perform to your satisfaction.

I understand that the two most important duties to be undertaken by the successful candidate are the analysis of several corporate loan portfolios and the preparation of a number of financial statements on a regular basis. In the fall of 20XX I was hired as an intern/consultant for the Tallahassee Bank of commerce, where I performed financial forecasts and breakeven analysis for a proposed branch, and both formulated competitive strategy and presented the proposal to bank officials.

As you will see from my resume, I was elected Blue Key National Honor Society member in the spring of 20XX, and through my part-time earnings financed 50% of my college tuition and 100% of my other college expenses. It is this level of drive and accomplishment that I can bring to Boston Factors of Canada. I look forward to the opportunity of discussing this position with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

John A. Ellis

418 Spring Road
Batavia, IL 60130
(708) 555-5567
ksioken@ksk.com

September 14, 20XX

Ms. Mildred Natwick
Director of Social Services
300 Mischener Road
Guelph, ON N1K 1E4
Canada

Dear Ms. Natwick:

Through Duke Wilson, a family friend who lives in Guelph, I learned that you were taking applications for an entry-level counselor's position that will be open at the end of the year. I believe that my 20XX sociology degree and an internship in a district court family services department qualify me for consideration. I hope you agree.

Mr. Wilson says that one of your priorities in filling this position is to find someone with at least an exposure in managing direct client services. As a judicial intern for the Aurora, Illinois Superior Court last summer, I had the opportunity to work closely with family services counselors throughout the entire process. By the end of the summer I had successfully managed a caseload of direct client services, including the complete processing of several domestic violence cases.

If you believe my background satisfies your minimum requirements for this opening, I would be happy to come up to Guelph for an interview at my own expense. (Mr. Wilson has already offered to put me up for a day or two, so most of my expenses would be covered.)

I'll call in a couple of weeks, after you have a chance to go through my resume and this letter, to see if you agree that an interview is a logical next step.

Sincerely,

Kara S. Kennedy
Enclosure

II. Preparing for the Interview

A Pre-Interview Checklist

If you feel good about the career preparations you've made up to this point, you're ready to tackle your first interview. Utilize every source possible to thoroughly research the interviewing company, the open position, and your prospective boss. A few sources to keep in mind.

- **The public or school library:** If you don't ask so many questions as to become a nuisance and are able to be specific in your requests, your public or school librarian (in either the career section or the professional and reference section) can be your best job-search ally. Appropriate business directories, periodicals, surveys, and databases are available in most libraries that will provide valuable information for you.
- **The company at which you are interviewing:** Call the company's public (or investor) relations department, and ask for recent corporate literature, including the annual report (or 10K for more sophisticated financial information) and any corporate literature describing company goods or services that will tell you more than you now know about such matters. Review the company's Web site as well.
- **The recruiter or the employment agency through which you are working:** Help your recruiter do a better job for you—it will improve his or her chances for a fee, after all—by getting information in the three categories listed below. For example:

Company—sales volume past two years; profits past two years; market share *vis-à-vis* competition; growth prospects; possible problems

Position—why open; how long open; prospects for advancement; how performance is measured; your standing *vis-à-vis* that of other candidates; major determining factors in decision to hire

The Boss—title; company background; prospects with the company; career background; management style; personality; professional strengths and weaknesses

Assure yourself the best chance for a first impression—before you shake the interviewer's hand. Here's how:

- Make your physical appearance everything it can be, in terms of basic business dress, neatness, and hygiene (see the video for specifics).
- Practice with a family member or friend for glitches in your interviewing style, including body language or mannerisms betraying such knockout factors as fear, discomfort, or arrogance.
- Check with an authoritative friend who knows, to be sure your vocabulary and diction are everything they should be.

Your listening skills are paramount, in three critical areas:

1. During interviewer questions, concentrate more on the substance of the questions than on the wording of your own answers.
2. Listen at peak efficiency so as to pick up hidden meanings (questions behind the interviewer's questions).
3. Guard against hearing "what you want to hear" and answering questions that are not asked, either wholly or in part.

Exercise 3:
Preparing for Your Interview

The three keys most important to a successful interview are preparation, preparation, and preparation. Whether your interview was set up by a recruiter or an employment agency or was the result of your answering an ad, the first part of your preparation should be focused on the company itself. Answer as many questions as possible from the list that follows.

Reading the Ad or Job Order

What position is the company looking to fill? _____

What attracted you to the job? _____

Reading between the lines—what do you think the company is really looking for? _____

What are the skills needed for the job? (e.g., initiative, working well under pressure, preparing financial statements, problem solving, good customer relations)

On an additional sheet of paper, list specific skills you have determined are necessary to do the job well. For each skill, list specific examples of instances in which you have demonstrated that skill.

Investigating the Company

What was the company's sales volume last year? _____ the year before? _____

What were the company's profits last year? _____ the year before? _____

How many employees are there in the company? _____

What are the company's prospects for growth? _____

What is the company's market share *vis à vis* its competitors? _____

What problems (challenges, opportunities) is the company facing? _____

Why do those problems exist? _____

How might they be overcome? _____

Exercise 4:
Investigating the Position

Most of the following information can't be discovered prior to the interview if you're following up on an ad. However, if your interview is the result of efforts made by a search firm or employment agency, be sure to ask your counselor these questions.

Why is the position open? _____

When was it last open and why? _____

How long has it been open? If two months or more, why is it so tough to fill? _____

Where is the person who previously held the job? Can we talk to him/her? _____

How many people have been interviewed so far? _____

How many candidates are still in the running? Why are they still being considered? _____

What are the prospects for advancement? _____

What does the job counselor think will be the determining factor in getting the job? _____

Why does the job counselor think you are still a candidate? _____

How many others in the company are doing the same work? _____

What is the salary policy? How are raises determined? How good is the benefits program? _____

How will performance be measured? _____

Who is the boss? What is his/her title? _____

How long has he/she been with the company? _____

What is his/her management style? _____

What are his/her prospects with the company? _____

Exercise 6:

Responding to Tough Questions

Every interviewer asks one or more tough questions. Some interviewers seem to ask nothing but tough questions. Basically, however, interviewers simply want to know what you can offer their company, why you left your last position, and what your strengths and weaknesses are.

The best way to handle such questions is to be prepared for them. We recommend that you write out your answers below, then memorize and practice them so that when the questions are asked, you'll be ready.

What do you know about our company? *(Do the research so you'll have some key information.)*

Why do you want to work for us? *(Things to think about in formulating your answer: challenge; "industry leader"; quality; growth potential.)*

What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't? *(Make sure your answer relates to the company's needs.)*

What about this position do you find most attractive? The least attractive? *(Careful!)*

Why should we hire you? *(Not because you need a job. Think about specific contributions you can make.)*

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Do you object to a drug-screening test? *(An increasing number of firms are requiring drug screening as a part of their pre-employment physical.)*

You may be “overqualified” for the position we have to offer. *(Think about how your experience is an asset and what kind of potential there is in the position for a person who may be more “qualified.”)*

Could you be a good manager? *(Give an example.)*

What do you see as the most difficult task in being a manager or executive?

Where do you want to be in five years? *(Relate your long-term goals to those of the company you’re interviewing with.)*

What are the three most significant accomplishments in your career so far in part-time and summer positions held?

If I spoke with your last boss, what would he/she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
(Think about acceptable weaknesses in terms of the requirements for the job.)

If you had a choice of jobs and companies, where would you go?
(You do have a choice, and the interviewer's company is it.)

Tell me about yourself. *(Talk about specific job-related accomplishments that demonstrate skills you think will meet the company's needs.)*

What are your strong points?

What are your weak points? *(No one is perfect. The trick is to find an acceptable weakness in terms of the job for which you are applying, then talk about what you've done to improve it.)*

What are your goals? What have you done to reach them?

Exercise 7:

Answering “Hidden Agenda” Questions

The first cousin to the “tough” question is the “hidden agenda” question. When there is a question behind the question, the interviewer is attempting to find out one thing by asking another. You need to recognize just what the interviewer is getting at—and then provide a well-thought-out answer.

How would you evaluate your last employer? (*Are you a complainer? Do you take responsibility for your action? Are you vindictive or self-pitying?*)

Who was your best boss? Describe him/her. (*What environment and management style are you most comfortable with?*)

What are you looking for in a job? (*Does this job match the applicant’s needs?*)

Please give me your definition of the position for which you are being interviewed. (*Does the applicant’s idea of the position match the reality in this company?*)

What is your “on-the-job” philosophy? *(Does your philosophy match the company's?)*

How long would you stay with us? *(Is this person going to be worth our investment?)*

In your current or last position, what did you like most? Least? *(How does this fit with the reality of what it's like to work in this company?)*

As a manager, what would you look for in hiring people?
(Is it the same thing this company looks for?)

Exercise 8:

Asking Your Own Questions

Listed below are questions you may need answers to in order to decide whether this is the right job for you. Obviously, not all of them apply to every position or candidate.

Because some of these questions are of a sensitive nature, an improper attitude could antagonize your interviewer. In framing your questions, you'll want to be positive in your approach and company-oriented in your thinking.

The Job Itself

What are the duties of the job?

To whom would I report in the job?

What is the extent of authority for the job?

The History of the Job

How long has the position been in existence?

How long has the position been open?

When was it last open?

Where is the person who previously held the job?

Why is he/she being replaced?

Coworkers

Who are the people I will be working with?

My immediate supervisor?

Subordinates?

Peers?

What are their titles? History in the company?

The Department

What are the company's long-range plans for this department?

What is the budgeting process as it relates to this department?

What is this department's reputation in the company?

How is morale?

The Company

In reading about the company I find _____

Do you agree?

What challenges do you think the company will face in the next year? In the next five years?

What is the predominant management style at the company?

What is the "culture"? What is it like to work here?

The Community

Where can I get information about housing, cost of living, religious and social organizations, shopping, commuting, schools, recreational facilities, etc.?

Advancement

How is the position evaluated?

What opportunities are there for growth, both in the job and beyond the job?

Training

Does the company have an orientation program for newly hired employees?

How do I become familiar with policies and procedures?

What training programs does the company offer?

Does the company have an executive development program?

III. After the Interview

Writing a Follow-up Letter

To write the best follow-up letter after your first interview with any company, assess your interview performance as honestly as you can—as soon as you are able to sit down and review it. For each job requirement discussed in the interview, write down your qualifications as well as the extent to which you were able to convey them to the interviewer. On another sheet of paper, write down your weaknesses, if any, for each of the job requirements, and the extent to which you were able to neutralize them in the interview. Then, using the following checklist, write a letter elevating your candidacy.

1. Restate your qualifications for the job, as well as your continuing interest.
2. Reinforce your candidacy where necessary by offering additional examples of your ability to satisfy the job's most important requirements.
3. Offer to complete a trial assignment for any area in which your skills or experience may be suspect.
4. Consult a business English textbook to be sure the form and style of your letter are appropriate.
5. Ask someone whose grammar and spelling skills you respect to give your letter a final check.

Ray Holmberg's letter to Ms. Epke, as read aloud in the video, is reprinted on the following page. Find in Ray's letter the application of each of the five points mentioned above.

1401 Kaneville Road
Galena, IL 60198
holmberg@rh.com
July 9, 20XX

Mrs. Marilyn Epke:

Thanks very much for your time yesterday regarding the editorial assistant opening at T.I.S. As I said then, this is a job I believe I can do well.

You mentioned that one important part of the job would be to become a fully participating member of the team as quickly as possible. It occurred to me later that I could have given you another example of my ability to be a “quick study” in addition to the town safety program to which I contributed.

The biology newsletter I wrote at Central State was not a job the editor thought I could handle. I convinced her to try me after showing her assignments from one of my creative writing courses. And although my first column needed several rewrites, I caught on quickly after that. Two samples are enclosed.

Again, thank you for the courtesy of answering all of my questions and for describing the job and your company so thoroughly. I am very interested in working for T.I.S. and would like to repeat my offer to take on a trial assignment that would convince you I am capable of doing a good job.

If I don't hear from you by the end of next week (you thought candidates for a second interview would be selected by then), I'll give you a call.

Sincerely,

Ray Holmberg
Enclosures

IV. Bibliography

Helpful Career Books

The books described below address various aspects of the entire job search, from career direction to the best ways to flourish on the new job. Read the annotations carefully. Some books cover more than one of the categories listed below.

Career Direction

International Job Finder. Where the Jobs Are Worldwide, by Daniel Lauber. (Gardena, CA: SCB Distributors, 2002.) Discusses in detail the use of both online and offline resources in international job hunting, including job databases, newsgroups for networking, résumé transmission, and advice on recognizing and avoiding possible scams. Organized geographically by country.

Résumés and Cover Letters

The Elements of Style, by Strunk, William, Jr., E.B. White, and Roger Angell. (New York: Pearson Higher Education, 4th Edition, 2000.) The best—and briefest—book available on making words count.

A Marketing Plan

Networking Survival Guide, by Diane Darling. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.) Practical advice on how to connect with other people to build, sustain, and leverage a productive network. Breaks down networking to its basic essentials, and makes it easy to understand. Dozens of helpful tips that take the anxiety—and mystery—out of networking.

Success on the Job

How to Succeed in Your First Job. Tips for College Graduates, by Holton, Elwood F. and Sharon S. Naquin. (Berkeley, CA: Publishers Group West, 2001.) Shows new first-time employees how to navigate in their new environments, earn credibility with their co-workers, and learn the unique aspects of how things *really* get done in a particular organization.

**For the most current job search resources,
visit www.jist.com or call 1-800-648-JIST.**