Interview Tips and Preparation

STEP 1: Prepare

- **Research the position and the organization**
  - Find a detailed job description and refer to job responsibilities during the interview
  - Read the organization’s literature, news articles on the employer, and other information sources to familiarize yourself with the employer

- **Know yourself, the employer, and the position**
  - List major points about yourself in relation to the position
  - Determine the answers to key questions
  - Analyze your academic, experiential, and extracurricular activities to discover what they reveal about your skills, values, and interests
  - Overcome any discomfort in discussing your strengths
  - Be prepared to articulate your weaknesses. Try to focus your weaknesses on job inexperience rather than on personal limitations. Discuss personal limitations in a positive light, or describe how you corrected or learned to compensate for them
  - From your resume, be prepared to explain what you accomplished, why you performed tasks a certain way, what you gained from the experience, and how it helped prepare you for your desired career field

STEP 2: Practice

- **Analyze and improve your communication skills**
  - Check the tone of your voice
  - Use good language, grammar, and diction. Avoid pauses using “um” and “uh” and phrases such as “you know” or “okay”
  - Develop a firm handshake and maintain eye contact
  - Eliminate nervous mannerisms
  - Dress appropriately and professionally. When in doubt, go conservative
  - Be aware of what your posture, gestures, and facial expressions are communicating. For example, poor posture may be viewed as lack of self-confidence

- **Become comfortable talking about yourself**
  - Familiarize yourself with the types of questions interviewers ask, and practice well thought-out answers
  - Rehearse but don’t memorize your responses
  - Practice in front of a mirror, with a friend, or with a tape recorder
  - Schedule a mock interview with a career counselor

- **Practice interviewing techniques**
  - Restate a long or complex question for clarity before you answer
  - Take time to think before you answer. Short pauses are acceptable
Learn to generate answers that are neither too long (over 2 minutes) nor too short (under 20 seconds)
Signal the end of a question or answer with a gesture, phrase, or voice tone
Frame your answer when appropriate. For example: “I see three main points….”
Use “bridging” techniques to introduce and expand upon information

STEP 3: PERFORM

- During the interview, your primary objective is to stress what you can do to meet the needs and goals of the employer
  o Focus your answers by emphasizing your accomplishments and experience
  o Reinforce the positive. Never say anything negative about past experiences; it could be interpreted that you are pessimistic and hard to get along with
  o Demonstrate your enthusiasm and self-confidence. Smile and Relax
  o Watch for clues that the interviewer is mentally with you
  o If the interviewer appears puzzled, stop and restate your reply. If he or she has obviously lost interest, ask if you covered the point adequately
  o Analyze your performance after each interview

STEP 4: FOLLOW-UP

- Following each interview, write a short and timely letter of appreciation to the interviewer
  o Include any information or documents requested
  o Briefly restate any points which may not have been communicated effectively
  o If you met with multiple people, send each person a different thank you letter
  o For on-site visits, send a letter to the key contact person who arranged the visit
  o Consider sending a separate letter to your potential supervisor, if you interviewed with that person

For tips on how to write a thank you letter, go to the Thank You Letter Guide located under Employer Correspondence

- Expenses
  o If claiming reimbursable expenses, state an accurate total and include original receipts

- Application Status
  o Never leave an interview without understanding the employer’s time frame and process for filling the job
  o If you have not heard from the employer a week or so after the stated time frame, you may call and ask for an update on your application status
  o Realize that activities and decisions may be delayed during holiday and prime vacation periods
  o If you receive a rejection, follow up with another letter expressing interest in future positions for which you may qualify