

Do you have any interviewing tips or strategies to help students get hired?

(GeoCareers Panel Luncheon 2018/2019)

Brandy Barnes (Draper Aden Associates): Always do your research on the company before interviewing. Come prepared with questions and take notes during the interview because it shows that you are interested in learning more. Dress the part, feel free to ask the company representative, HR coordinator, or maybe a company contact for dress code expectations. Try your best to engage in the interview in pleasant conversation. You put in the time and energy to land that interview, so enjoy your moment to shine! A great resume may get you to an interview, but a great interview lands the job. They are interested in you, smile and communicate in a friendly manner. If you choose to practice networking as a student or young professional, interviewing will become easier and more fluid. It will also help you learn ways of controlling those pesky nerves.

Terry Briggs (Newmont Goldcorp): Our Human Resources department presented these tips with graduates recently. When preparing for an interview, research the company you will be interviewing with (despite how easy this is, you would be surprised how few still do this), prepare for commonly asked questions (about yourself, strengths & weaknesses, why do you want to work here...). During the interview pay attention to body language, use discretion, avoid discriminatory subjects, ask questions, actively listen and walk away knowing the next steps in the process. Ask questions such as what do the interviewers most enjoy about the company, what is expected to be accomplished, type of training on offer, etc. After the Interview, send a thank you email, follow-up with the company keeping in mind the timeline they've shared and keep them informed of changes in relation to your job search. Don't be afraid to ask your point of contact what the dress code is, I was once on a remote mine site where two recent graduates arrived for an on-site interview, one in a suit and tie, the other in jeans and a t-shirt (both were hired!).

J.P. Dube (Chesapeake Energy): Make sure you have other people look at your resume. You don't have to act on everyone's feedback, but you should solicit as much as possible. It's amazing what blind spots we have about ourselves. Then make sure you research the company you are interviewing with. You don't have to be an expert, but you'd be amazed how many candidates I see that don't know where we are located. And finally, bring energy to the process. You probably got into geoscience because something about it excited you, don't be afraid to share that passion during an interview.

Alicia Kahn (Chevron Energy Corporation): Practice interviewing. Go to your career center and solicit help and mock questions. Most interviews have situational questions so try to think of specific scenarios that will help describe your personality, communication skills, scientific prowess, team suitability, and leadership. The more you interview the more polished you become. Be sure to tailor your answers so they are appropriate/relevant to that which you know (do your research) about the company/organization/department to which you are applying.

Greg Liggett (Bureau of Land Management): Research the bureau and office that you have applied to. As best as you can, learn all about the position. Federal job descriptions are often vague, and the same position title may be responsible for very different duties. For example, a job class of Geologist might work in oil and gas, minerals,

mine engineering, coal, or even paleontology. Be aware of what the position is, because their expectations of your background and experience would be very different for each of those positions.

Each federal agency has its own mission. Learn about the agency. We are big on “authorities,” that is, what the specific law is that authorizes us to do our work. For the BLM our authority starts with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA, pronounced “Flip Ma”). Become familiar with that. Also, much of many agencies’ work is directed by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, “Ne-Pa”). If you can demonstrate that you have a basic knowledge of these laws, you can at least “speak the lingo” a bit, and maybe distinguish yourself.

Bruce Schumacher (US Forest Service): Be sure you emphasize loyalty and devotion to discipline. Also stress good inter-personal skills – working with/following/leading other individuals. Show that you have good communication skills by being yourself, being comfortable, not searching for fancy words. Stress that you have (and make sure you do have) good writing skills. So much of what we do is writing effectively, and adapting our writing to be well received by a range of audiences. Good technical/corporate/bureaucratic writing skills are super important.

Limaris (Lima) Soto (National Park Service): Research the agency/company before you interview for the position and make sure to practice the interview with a friend, don’t just “wing it”. Most of the questions that they will ask are available online so that you can practice the answer before the interview. Dress appropriately for the interview, even though your position might be in the field you should dress professionally for the interview. Prepare questions for the interviewer about the position and after the interview send an email/card thanking the interviewer.

Lisa White (UC Museum of Paleontology): Be persistent and also be open to the variety of internships and job opportunities in and outside your immediate discipline to grow your base of knowledge. Communication skills are equally as important as technical skills so seek opportunities to polish your speaking, writing, and presentation skills.

Bret Dixon (Anadarko Petroleum): Be friendly, be open about what motivates you, be inquisitive, share what makes you unique, be team oriented, good communication skills. You need to be passionate about geoscience and have a desire to learn and build upon the foundation you have created via your academic education.

Leslie Hsu (U.S. Geological Survey): When I applied, I was reminded many times to follow the instructions and requirements in the ad very carefully so as not to get filtered out on the initial pass. It helps to repeat the keywords from the ad in your CV and cover letter. I recommend to try to talk to someone on the phone about the position even before submitting an application, this can give you more insight into what exactly the hiring team is looking for, and if it’s a good fit. Be collegial and friendly at workshop and meeting socials. As scientists, we are among a lot of introverts, but if you find a common topic, you’ll have a great connection and add to your network. You might even find out about unadvertised job opportunities - that has happened to me in the past.

Jason Kenworthy (National Park Service): One of the keys to landing an interview is to spend the time making sure your resume is tailored to each job you are applying for. It takes more time upfront but makes it much easier for the Human Resources folks and the Hiring Official to navigate. Federal resumes are very different than industry

or academic resumes in that there is no preferred length or format. For example, mine is 15 pages long, and covers nearly 18 years of experience in more than a dozen positions (volunteer, intern, contractor, seasonal, student, term, and permanent employee). You should make sure that everything that is listed in the announcement is reflected in some way in your resume and use the same terminology as the announcement. Make it clear that you are qualified for the position you are applying for and do not assume that the hiring official will “know what you meant”. If you have any relevant experience with an agency, even if volunteer, make sure to include that in your resume. You should not overstate your qualifications and experience but do not sell yourself short either. Consider organizing your resume by job knowledge, skills, and abilities rather than just chronological to ensure that it is clear that you meet the requirements.

The interview itself is your opportunity to turn your on-paper accomplishments and experience into a real human so be honest and genuine—the interviewer is seeing if you will be a good fit for their team. Let your passion for the position and the park come through but keep your answers concise and make sure you do actually answer the question. If you can practice with friends or colleagues that have experience interviewing, do so. Ask them for questions they like to ask or that may be challenging to answer. And remember to come with some of your own questions about the park and position. Re-read the position description and do some research about the park or office you are interviewing with. You also want to make sure the position is a good fit for you! Be patient with the process even though it is frustrating. There is usually a relatively quick turnaround time (few days-few weeks) for internship positions. However federal positions through USAJobs may take many weeks or months from when you apply to the interview to the notification of whether you were selected for the position. If you were under consideration/interviewed but not selected for a position, after the interview process reach out via email or phone to the hiring official to thank them for the opportunity and inquire about ways to improve. The land management agency world is relatively small. Networking and relationships are very important, so make sure to learn as much as you can from your interview experiences, and be persistent and vocal about your career goals.

Ken Ridgway (Purdue University): I recommend approaching an interview as starting a relationship with a company. Find out what they want in the relationship and be clear about what you are seeking in the relationship. These kinds of honest approaches during interviews lead to good matches and fulfilling careers.

Todd Thompson (Indiana Geological and Water Survey): The more you learn about the organization and staff the better. I am always impressed by the candidates that have researched us and what we do. With the internet, today, that is not that difficult. I always comes down to the fit of the individual with the needs of the position. Survey’s do not have liberty to conduct extensive on the job training. We need someone to hire-up and hit the ground running. Focus on your accomplishments and your ability to complete tasks. Be curious and ask lots of questions.