

**School of International and Public Affairs
Columbia University
Office of Career Services**

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK DURING AN INTERVIEW

The job interview is really a conversation between you and the interviewer. You will be asked questions about your motivations, interests and skills, but you will also want to gain valuable information about the organization and position for which you are applying. Consequently, you should be prepared to ask relevant and targeted questions. A good interviewer will ask if you have any questions, usually at the conclusion of the interview. If you are not invited to do so, you should take the initiative to ask questions anyway. Below please find some general pointers for creating your repertoire of questions:

1. Do your research! Investigate organizational literature, newspapers and magazines. Also, speak with people who have knowledge of the organization and/or industry. Your research on the organization and career field will help you formulate suitable questions.
2. Be sure your questions are meaningful and job related; **try not to ask for very general information already available in the organization's brochure or other material.** In other words, put some thought into your questions.

The following list provides a selection of questions you may want to ask the interviewer, or you may create some of your own. ***Your questions will vary depending on whether the job is in the public or private sector, so you should choose only those that are relevant for you and the position for which you are applying.*** It is wise to have three to five questions prepared, realizing that several may be answered during the interview. Keep in mind that there will usually be time for only a few questions.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

- What makes your organization unique or different from others in its category?
- What are your organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the single biggest challenge facing your organization now?
- What are your organization's plans for future growth?
- How would you describe your organization's culture and management style?

ABOUT THE JOB ITSELF AND ITS POSITION WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

- Please describe the overall structure of the organization?
- Where does this position fit in the overall organization?
- What is the overall structure of the department in which the position is located? What are the future plans for that department?
- How much contact is there between departments/between individuals in the organization?
- What are the typical first-year assignments? About what percentage of my time would be spent in

different tasks/functions?

- Tell me about your initial and future training and/or professional development opportunities.
- Is it organizational policy to promote from within? What percentage of supervisory positions are filled from within the organization? What is the work history of your top management?

PEOPLE ISSUES IN THE ORGANIZATION

- What characteristics does a successful person have at your organization?
- May I talk to someone who currently holds or recently held this job?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted? How often would my performance be reviewed?
- Why do you enjoy working for this organization?
- What qualities are you looking for in new hires?
- From what schools were recent graduates hired during the last two years? Are any graduates from SIPA working here?

The part of the interview in which you ask questions is both a chance for you to demonstrate your motivation and interest in the job as well as a chance for you to get the information you may need later when evaluating job offers.