

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING FOR FWCS JOBS

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I. Common questions in FWCS interviews

- Tell me a little about yourself and your background. *(Shine here and fully introduce yourself as a strong candidate! Very important to practice this intro in advance.)*
- What are your long-range career goals in the field of fisheries, wildlife, and conservation?
- How will you meet the duties of this position?
- Describe your previous experiences and how they will help you in this role.
- What do you consider to be your strengths and why?
- What do you consider to be your weaknesses and why?
- Tell me about a time when you made a decision you were proud of.
- Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a group problem.
- Give an example of where you had to analyze a problem, determine possible solutions and implement a solution with little or no supervision.
- Describe a time when you had a miscommunication with a coworker or staff member? How did you resolve the situation?
- This position requires navigation in remote areas in vehicles and often over steep, uneven terrain on foot while enduring harsh environmental conditions such as high winds or extreme heat. How would you prepare to avoid personal injury?
- Please describe what customer service means to you and describe your experience serving or interacting with the public.
- How would you define a safe work environment?
- If we come to the end of this interview with two equally qualified candidates and you are one of them, what can you tell me that would convince me to select you?
- Do you have any questions for me?

II. Tips for interview preparation

Practice, practice, practice is the key to successful interviewing. A student going to a job interview without preparing is like an actor performing on opening night without rehearsing.

A quality candidate should anticipate roughly 80% of the questions an employer asks. Every answer should be backed up by an example or a reason.

1. Research the organization and the position; understand what that specific division/unit focuses on.

There is abundant information about most organizations and/or supervisors on the web. Use the information when answering questions

Question: *Why do you want to work for us?*

Answer: *I am interested in helping conserve native Lahontan trout and I saw on the web that you have been working in trout recovery for 10 years...or Learning the ODFW stream survey protocol will help me assess riparian condition throughout my career in fisheries.*

2. Prepare

- As you enter the interview, smile, be friendly, and thank them for inviting you to the interview
- When able, introduce yourself with brief summary of your background (why you are interested in FWCS, what class level you are, what your professional interests/goals are, what volunteer or work experience you've had). DO NOT assume that the employer knows anything about you.
- Review the job announcement in detail, and write a list of questions you think they may ask. Make a list of your skills, key assets and unique strengths that relate to each job duty described in the job announcement.
- Practice your ASTAR responses to these questions. Be prepared to share past experiences where you:
 - 1) used your talents successfully,
 - 2) worked effectively in a group or team setting,
 - 3) communicated ideas or information effectively, and
 - 4) handled conflict successfully. Provide examples to give concrete evidence of your strengths and skills
- Similarly, prepare several specific "success stories" that you want to make sure you share in the interview. What are the 2-3 key points they MUST hear about you in this interview?
- Practice your responses to avoid 'ums' and rambling. When finished with answer, remain silent
- Be prepared to discuss a weakness, in a positive way (e.g. *I have sometimes over-committed because I am so excited about getting involved in wildlife science*)
- Be concise. You have 2-3 minutes for each question and most interviews last 20 minutes

3. Image

- Look neat, clean and well-groomed; dress the part which is typically business casual (khakis and button-down shirt) or field professional (clean newer blue jeans and button down shirt)
- Use a firm handshake and address the interviewer by name if possible
- Make comfortable eye contact and sit upright
- Relax and smile, have a sense of humor. Appear alert and interested. Be aware of your non-verbal behavior (fidgeting, etc.). Answer questions with enthusiasm and motivation.
- Be sure of yourself but not over-confident. Express your desire to learn

4. Follow-Up

- Thank the interviewers for their time
- Ask them relevant questions about the position or the work they do, not about pay or logistics (e.g. *How will these data be used in management? is the current trout recovery program going? What special challenges or problems are involved in this job? What have other students gained from this job?*)
- Ask if you can provide additional information if you feel did not effectively answer a previous question.
- Write a thank you email, mentioning a key point in the interview so that the employer remembers you.

III. Use the ASTAR Method to ace your interview!

The ASTAR method is a way to respond to any behavioural or competency questions in an interview, such as “Tell me about a time when...” or “What would you do if...?”. In such a question, the interviewer wants you to tell a story that demonstrates a certain quality about yourself, such as how you resolve conflict, problem solve and innovate, or work within a team. You can prepare before an interview by using the ASTAR method to prepare your responses to common questions and especially focus on those you most expect them to ask. Your ASTAR response is a short, truthful, and story-based response that follows these guidelines:

Answer – quickly respond to the question with yes/no or brief summary

Situation - describe the background context

Task – describe your role in that situation

Action* - describe the action you took to meet the challenge (emphasize)

Results* - describe what good things resulted from your action (emphasize)

Each letter (A, S, T, A, R) should be only 1-2 sentences long, with emphasis on your Actions and Results. Use “I” statements to highlight what good things you did in this story. Remember to keep your story to 2 minutes or less.

IV. Interviews with ODFW (Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife):

The information in this section is useful to students applying to any ODFW position, whether seasonal, fulltime, or student internship, and also for positions with state agencies in Oregon, Washington, and likely beyond.

These are competitive positions and so shining in the interview is key to success. Typically, these interviews are run over the phone with a panel of interviewers, who rotate asking a set number of fixed questions. Interview lengths can vary from 10 to 60 minutes. As the questions are usually pre-determined, there may be no opportunity for back-and-forth conversation, and so it’s especially important to use your responses to make a strong case for your candidacy for this specific position.

For student internship positions, You are likely competing with several other undergraduates with similar backgrounds, and so you need to find a way to very clearly show them that 1) you will excel in the duties of this position, 2) that you are very interested in this specific position (rather than any ODFW internship), and 3) that this position will greatly advance you in your specific career goals. We recommend you prepare extensively for this interview.

How ODFW processes your Application

- 1. You submit your application online, which includes your resume (as entered into the online system) and responses to supplemental questions.** Do not submit at the last minute.

- a. To prepare a great application, please [read ODFW's tip sheet here](#). For example, your resume should be 1-1.5 pages and must include specific working dates and hrs/week for all FWCS-related positions, as HR will need to tally up your total hours of experience with all relevant job skills.
 - b. **Don't under rank your experience.** You will likely have supplemental questions that ask about your experience level with relevant skills and job duties. Be honest but know that you likely need to rank your experience level as 'proficient' or 'expert' in most questions in order to make it to the interview stage.
 - c. (For jobs in rural areas of the state, or with Oregon State Parks, instead of a live interview panel, you will submit **recorded video clips** for your interview. In these, you generally get two tries to submit each 90-second response to an interview question. This style is used often for positions in rural areas of the state, and for positions with Oregon State Parks.)
2. **Your application is first reviewed by HR**, which gives you a numerical ranking based on your job-related proficiency. This ranking accounts for factors like the amount of time & experience you have in each skill or duty relevant to this job, and the experience levels you entered in the supplemental questions.
 - a. ODFW will often get ~100 applicants for a seasonal job open for 2 wks. So, getting into the interview stage is the key to success, which means that you must get a high score for how well your resume and responses to supplemental questions show that you have high proficiency in the job-related skills and tasks.
 - b. (Note: For ODFW student internship positions, your application may bypass HR and go directly to the hiring supervisor for their review.)
 3. **HR will send the 6-10 highest ranking applications to the job supervisor for consideration to interview.** Arrive 15 minutes early for your interview, as you may be given the interview questions 10 minutes prior to the start time. Dress formally.
 4. **The interview will likely have a panel of 3-5 interviewers that will ask ~10 pre-determined questions for a 45-minute interview. They will give you a numerical score based *only* on the verbal answers you provide in the interview.** Your previous ranking is not considered, and so everyone starts at a blank slate in the interview process.
 - a. **The interview panelists can *only* score you for what you verbally say in the interview.** I.e., they cannot assess your resume or other application materials. So, if you have a relevant experience that you do not discuss in the interview, even though it's on your resume, you will not receive any points for this in your interview.
 - b. The panelists will be taking detailed notes on what you say, and so their heads will generally be down and there will be a lot of silent pauses. This generally feels awkward, but it's just how the process is.

- c. **Generally, higher scores correlate to** the number of times that you mention any previous experience that you have with skills and duties related to this job. You should take up the full amount of time, talking for ~4 minutes per question.
 - i. **Start your response by:** asking for a moment to compose your response. Then, tell a vivid story that relates to the question, and then continue to talk and list all experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities you have related to the job and to the question. Remember that personal experience is also important to share!
 - ii. **Present yourself as fun, easy to work with, confident, and very excited for this job.** Your demonstrated passion, enthusiasm, and excitement for this job will give you higher scores, even if you lack formal experience.
 - d. **At the end of the interview, you can ask to re-visit a question to offer more details in your response.** Do this! You can increase your score greatly in this way.
5. **The interviewers will select the three finalists with the highest interview scores, and offer the job to the highest ranking candidate.**
- a. It is common that several candidates turn down the job, and that several months pass. If none of the top three candidates accepts the job, the interviewers then have a lot of flexibility in who they hire, and so can then select someone who scored lower in their interview, but who has followed up frequently and showed a lot of enthusiasm and interest. So, **ODFW recommends that you follow up after the interview and check in every couple of weeks.** Come across as excited and interested over email.

Common questions in ODFW interviews include:

- Tell us about your experience and skills in data management, and in using Excel.
- Tell us about your experience and skills in handling conflict with the public.
- How will you meet the duties of this position?
- Describe your previous experiences and how they will help you in this role.
- What do you intend to learn from the internship?
- How would you define a safe work environment?
- What are your career goals and how will this help you reach them?
 - *Advice:* be very specific about your goals and name a specific job or two that you're aiming for. These may change later, of course, but it's important in an interview to show that you've done your research and have a clear goal.
- What would you do if your personal beliefs/values differed or conflicted with the job and tasks you have been assigned?
 - *Advice:* This is a trick question. They are not actually asking what your personal opinion/beliefs are. They want to hear "As an employee of this agency, I would set aside personal beliefs and ideas, in order to carry out the tasks assigned to maintain alignment with the mission of the program and agency." This question may come up in

internships dealing with predators or other controversial management topics such as culling or lethal removal.

- Do you have any questions for us?
 - *Advice:* A unique response would be: “Are there any questions that I have answered that have not quite hit your mark, or that you would like the opportunity to revisit so that I can provide clarification or answer any additional questions my original answer may have brought up?”
- Tell us about an experience you have working independently.
 - *Great Answer:* Tell a vivid story that demonstrates how you’ve thrived or achieved while working independently, and then list your personality traits and/or specific experience you have that makes you strong in this arena.
- Tell us about your computer experience, especially using the software Excel.
 - *Great Answer:* First give a general, overarching answer, and then list specific things you can do in Excel, which will show your high-level understanding of how to use this software while on this new job. For example: “Yes, I am extremely proficient with using computers and common software programs such as X, Y, and Z. I’ve used these things in my three years of college coursework, including two years of completing classes online, and in my year of employment inIn Excel, I know how to analyze data using Pivot tables, to use statistical functions like ..., to examine and clean large datasets using filter and sorting tools, to create charts and graphs, to....

More tips to score highly in your ODFW interview

Dress formally. Project self-assured body language. Enter the room confidently and friendly. Give a confident handshake and equal eye contact to all panel members, and demonstrate good posture and demeanor. Try to relax, smile, and show a sense of humor.

Arrive 10-15 minutes early. You may be given the interview questions 10 minutes in advance. If so, prepare your answers at this time, remembering to offer a vivid, story-based answer. Allow yourself time to compose your thoughts and deliver that confident first impression. Be enthusiastic and show interest. Call if you are unavoidably detained and explain your situation. Show common courtesy throughout the entire process.

Do your homework. Research the position and division for which you are applying. Know the specific duties of the job and the needs of the division. If possible, talk to the person who was last in the position, get a copy of the position description, and talk to other supervisors, managers and workers whose work is affected by the position you are interested in. Target your discussion around how your experience and strengths will help meet those needs.

Don’t be intimidated by silence. Give yourself time to think of an appropriate answer and/or example from your past experience.

Answer all parts of the question. Listen carefully. Don't skip over any portion of the question. Answer each question clearly and concisely. If necessary, ask the panel to repeat the question. To receive credit for all parts of the question you must address and answer all parts.

Give the best real life examples that you can. You have a very small window of opportunity to convince the panel to hire you. Give more than a yes or no answer. Give examples of how you have applied your knowledge, skills and abilities. If your interview is 45 minutes and you rush through it in 20 minutes, you will probably not give the panel enough time and information to get to know you. On the same token, you want to manage your time and stay within the time allotted.

Remember that you are only scored for what you SAY in the interview, and that your resume isn't considered in the interview stage. The panel cannot give you credit for what you have done or can do unless you discuss it during the interview.

Resist the temptation to speak negatively about anything. This includes peers, supervisors, the agency, etc. This sends a negative message about you. If you talk negatively about others or the agency, the panel assumes you will continue to do so in the new job. Maintain a professional demeanor.

Sell yourself. Be sure to communicate that you want the job. Know your strengths and how they fit this job. Be prepared to discuss your strengths citing examples. Do not read them to the panel or expect the panel to read them. Talk about your accomplishments. There is a fine line between bragging and discussing your strengths; however, if you don't sell yourself, no one else will. Three critical areas to cover are: integrity, competence and self-motivation.

Prepare a couple of questions to ask about the position. Don't just ask about "when they hope to make a decision". There are many good questions that can be asked. Remember, the interview is also a good time for you to gather information for yourself and whether the job is a good fit for you too. Asking good, relevant questions shows a genuine interest in the position.

Thank the panel members for their time. Another handshake is a great way to end the interview. Tell the panel members you appreciate their time and consideration. After the interview, think of the things that went well and think of how you could do better the next time.

Prepare, prepare, prepare, and enjoy your interview!