



Interviewing

The Purpose of the Interview

The interview is an opportunity for an employer or graduate school to determine which candidate(s) is the best fit for a job, internship, or graduate school program. It is your opportunity to convey your interest in the position and the skills and experiences you have gained that make you a strong candidate. The interviewer is looking to determine the following:

- How will you contribute to the company/staff/graduate school program?
- Can you demonstrate the skills they are seeking?
- What experiences do you have that relate to the job?
- Are you the best fit?

Types of Interviews

Screening Interviews

Screening interviews are an efficient way for employers to conduct an initial assessment of applicants. Employers use screening interviews to evaluate an applicant's interest in the position, their strengths and communication skills, and to determine which applicants will be invited for additional interviews. Screening interviews can be conducted through on-campus recruiting, virtually, or by telephone. They may be as brief as ten minutes or last for a half hour or more.

A screening interview should be treated as seriously as an in-person interview as it usually determines whether or not you will be invited to continue to the next step in the process.

Send a thank you note within 24 hours of the interview reiterating your enthusiasm for the position and your interest in the opportunity to meet for another interview.

In-Person Interviews

Being invited for an in-person interview usually indicates that you are one of a select number of applicants being seriously considered for the position. This may be your second or even third interview for the position. These interviews are typically conducted by the immediate supervisor or by several people who will have input into the hiring process. In addition to possessing the skills specific to the position, employers are looking for candidates who can communicate well, problem solve, take initiative, work effectively in teams, and are genuinely enthusiastic about the position and the organization. To interview well, you must demonstrate these attributes through your accomplishments, while also relating your knowledge, skills, and abilities to the position. It is also your opportunity to ask thoughtful questions. An interview may be scheduled for one hour or you may be asked to participate in a series of interviews with different people over several hours or an entire day. Remember you are at an interview the entire time you are there. Treat every person you meet with appropriate respect.

Virtual Interviews

Many interviews are now being conducted virtually. A virtual interview should be treated differently than a virtual class or simple Zoom meeting. Find a space where you can interview in private. Select your background, choose something very neutral or professional. *You can also reserve an office space in the Career Center to guarantee a quiet, professional space.* Select a desk or table with a flat raised surface. Do not be sitting down, slumped on a couch, or on a bed.

Consider what device might be the best to use. Do you have access to a computer which might provide the best connection, or will you have to use a tablet or a phone? Use a stable internet connection. If you have spotty WiFi connection consider using a different location, or an alternative to your WiFi. Make sure your equipment is functioning and fully charged. Test it ahead of time. Consider your camera angle. Have a good microphone and consider headphones if your audio set-up is not optimal. If you want captions, make sure you have pre-adjusted the setting for it.

Get the interviewers' email and phone number and share your contact information prior to the interview, in case something goes wrong with technology. Download and practice whichever platform the interviewer selects. They may use Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, or their own platform. Have it set up and understand how it works before your interview. Consider the time zone of the interviewer as you plan your interview.

You should dress professionally. Log in 15 minutes early and turn on your camera and unmute yourself as soon as you connect. Test your volume to make sure it is on and you can hear properly. It is fine to mute yourself and turn off the camera if you arrive in the space first. You can stay that way while you wait for the interviewer to arrive,

then turn them back on. Close all other browsers which are not related to the interview, in case you need to share your screen. Turn off email or social media notifications that might pop up on your screen. Also turn off your phone. Use a professional screen name; if you are on a shared account or if you use the platform for other communications, be sure your name and or title are appropriate to the interview. You may also wish to include your pronouns.

If you interview with one individual, you can use either speaker or gallery view. If you are interviewing with two or more interviewers, you will want to select the gallery view. Focus your eye contact on the camera, not down at the screen. Completely focus on the interview, don't do anything else. Do not eat, drink, or be on your phone. If you are taking notes, ask them if they mind before you start.

Along this same line, you can have a cheat sheet, some key note or things you want to remember to include in your conversation. Do not plan to read directly from your notes during the interview. Lean forward a little in your chair and have good posture. Positive body language is important. Ramp up your energy level a little. You want to convey that you are interested in the position. Smile and act as you would if you were talking to them in person.

Phone Interviews

A Phone Interview may be a screening interview or a longer conversation. Be sure to clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place. Find a quiet place where you are alone and free from background noise and distraction. If possible, use a landline; otherwise be sure you have a strong phone signal, your phone is fully charged, and you have not auto-blocked unknown numbers. Be ready and waiting 15 minutes early. Answer the incoming call with your name. "Hello, this is John Doe."

Speak slowly and clearly. Smile throughout the interview; a smile can be heard in your voice. It is recommended that you dress in a professional manner and to sit up straight at a desk or table for a phone interview. This will get you into the interview mindset and help you focus on the conversation as a professional interaction. A challenge of the phone interview is that it can be difficult to gauge how the interviewer feels about your responses to questions. There are no visual cues. There may be pauses in the conversation or awkward moments when both you and the interviewer begin to speak at the same time. Understand that this is an unavoidable drawback of phone interviews and does not mean that the interview is not going well. One of the benefits of a phone interview is that, like an open note exam, you can be looking at the organization's website or your own notes while you are speaking with the interviewer.

Preparing for Interviews

For Graduate and Professional School Interviews

Research the college or university and the specific program to which you are applying. Familiarize yourself with the mission statement of the college/university as well as the mission of the academic department.

Carefully prepare your application materials, including your resume and personal statement/statement of purpose. Seek feedback on your writing from the Career Center, faculty members, and the Writing Center.

Be able to discuss your reasons for choosing the graduate program and why you want to attend the college or university.

Be prepared to talk about your areas of interest for research; know the research studies and projects of the faculty members in your department and ask about research opportunities.

Be ready to answer questions about your career goals and their relevance to the graduate degree.

Prepare questions to ask that will help you determine if the program will meet your objectives.

For Job Interviews

Research the organization using their website, industry/professional journals, and online searches. Learn the company's mission statement and purpose.

Follow the organization on LinkedIn and see if any of your existing contacts work there.

Know about their services, products, history, and current initiatives.

Read articles about the company; review latest sales/revenue information.

Know their primary competitors.

Use their website to learn about the organizational structure and work environment.

Career Readiness Competencies

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has worked with Employers and Career Development Experts to create eight Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce. Students should be able to give examples that prove to employers that they possess these competencies.

Career and Self-Development: Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.

Critical Thinking: Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.

Equity and Inclusion: Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.

Leadership: Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.

Professionalism: Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.

Teamwork: Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.

Technology: Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.

Prepare to Answer Interview Questions

While you cannot anticipate every question an interviewer will ask, you should take time to practice speaking confidently and articulately about your skills and accomplishments. The interviewer is trying to determine how well you know yourself and how familiar you are with the position and the company. Preparing in advance allows you to express yourself in a well-organized, professional manner.

Use the research you've collected to be able to discuss WHY you want to work for the organization and WHY you would be a good fit.

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is an interviewing technique that allows the interviewer to learn about your past experiences to assess your qualifications for the job. The interviewer will ask about how you have responded to specific situations in the past to determine how you will handle situations as an employee. Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. You might be asked about experiences related to teamwork, problem-solving, handling conflict, initiative, adaptability, leadership, decision making, and overcoming obstacles.

Know Your Skills and Strengths

It is important to let them know what you will bring to the company that will make you a valuable addition to their staff. Be prepared to discuss accomplishments that demonstrate the strengths and skills which they are seeking. Always use examples of situations where you have demonstrated these skills and strengths.

Exercise #1 Make a List of YOUR Top Four Skills and Abilities

Abilities are natural or innate characteristics that make you valuable as an employee.

Examples: Being Dependable, Being Flexible, Demonstrating Creativity, Possessing Grit

Skills are the qualities you have gained through experience, education, or training.

Examples: Communication Skills, Computer or Technical Skills, Industry Specific Skills, Managerial Skills

SKILLS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

ABILITIES

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

S.T.A.R. Method:

An effective way to answer questions is to use the S.T.A.R. method to describe a past situation that relates to the question:

Sample Question: "Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with someone you worked with."

S – Describe the Situation.

- Provide a brief context for the situation.
- What were the circumstances?

Example: "When I was working as a lifeguard last summer, we always worked with another lifeguard for every shift. Most days the person I worked with would leave early, leaving me alone to watch all of the swimmers and to clean and close the pool area."

T – What Task did you have to accomplish?

- What needed to be done?
- What were the issues surrounding the task?

Example: "I had to address the lifeguard who wasn't staying until the end of the day because having only one staff member on duty created a safety issue for the guests and a liability for the club."

A – Explain the Actions you took.

- What did you do?
- How did that help accomplish the goal?

Example: "I contacted the other lifeguard and explained to her that our supervisor and the owners of the club expect two lifeguards on site at all times. I told her that I am not comfortable to be responsible for all of the guests by myself and that if an emergency arose, not only would we lose our jobs but the club owners could face legal action."

R – What were the Results?

- What was the outcome or end result?
- How was the result based on your actions?

Example: "Although at first, she was a little defensive, she said she understood how I felt and actually thanked me for talking to her instead of going to our supervisor. She said she has another job in the evenings and sometimes leaves early so she won't be late for the other job. I suggested she talk to both of her supervisors to see if a schedule could be arranged that allowed her to have both jobs, which she was able to do."

Exercise #2: Cite a different example of your own experiences using the STAR method for each of the Skills and Abilities you identified in Exercise #1. Develop short stories around your experiences to describe your strengths and possible obstacles you had to overcome. These stories may come from work, school, internships or co-curricular involvement.

S - Situation, T - Task, A - Action, R - Result

Skill #1 _____

S
T
A
R

Ability #1 _____

S
T
A
R

Skill #2 _____

S
T
A
R

Ability #2 _____

S
T
A
R

Skill #3 _____

S
T
A
R

Ability #3 _____

S
T
A
R

Skill #4 _____

S
T
A
R

Ability #4 _____

S
T
A
R

Interview Questions:

You can't possibly prepare for every single possible question you may be asked during an interview but if you prepare in advance and you are able to identify your strengths and then tell a story to demonstrate them, you should be able to work those stories into whatever questions they ask.

The first two or three questions will almost always be:

1. *Tell me about yourself.*

Prepare a two-minute response that may include your education, a few examples of work experiences and athletic/leadership/volunteer/internship experiences, and your career objectives. Your response should connect your education and experiences with the position you're interviewing for.

2. *Why do you want to be a (teacher/ physical therapist/ financial planner/ etc.)?*

They want to know that this position aligns with your career goals and that you are passionate about your career field. Explain what led you to pursue this career.

3. *Why do you want to work here?*

This is a chance for you to demonstrate that you have researched the employer. Talk about how much you like their mission, clients, culture, etc., and how they align with your interests, abilities, and experience. Do not talk about why it would be good for you in terms of superficial things like location or salary.

The bulk of the interview will be a mixture of different types of questions which may include:

General information seeking questions

What are some accomplishments which make you proud?

What experiences have you had that have prepared you for this career?

How has your Springfield College education prepared you for this position?

What personal quality do you feel will most contribute to your career success?

What specific career goals have you established?

Tell me about your internship at ABC Company.

Are you familiar with Microsoft Office tools?

What are your short term and long term career goals?

What is your greatest strength?

Behavioral interview questions:

Tell me about a successful experience you've had working as a part of a team.

Describe a situation in which you have worked under pressure.

Tell me about a time when you worked with a group or a team to complete a project. What was your role? What difficulties did the group/team have?

Describe a situation in which you were able to persuade someone.

Describe a situation when you had to motivate others.

Describe the best supervisor you ever worked for and why you liked working for that person.

Describe a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Tell me about the most recent presentation you gave. How did you prepare?

"Red Flag" questions

Share an experience you had in dealing with a difficult customer and how you handled it.

Tell us about a time you failed.

Tell me about the most challenging work situation you've faced and how you handled it.

What would you change about your last supervisor?

Have you ever had to work with someone with whom you didn't get along?

Tell me about a time when your best effort didn't achieve the desired result. What did you learn?

"Red Flag" questions are not as straightforward as they appear. They are looking to find out how you handle adversity, however, the interviewer is also looking to assess your attitude. Employers do not want to hear negative comments about your past experiences and interactions. If you say negative things about co-workers, customers, or experiences, it will reflect negatively on you. You want to find a way to be diplomatic, talk about challenges rather than problems, and convey that you are able to get through difficult situations while maintaining your professionalism. They also want to know that you have a growth mindset, and that you are coachable. Be prepared to include what you learned from the experience in your answer.

In general, when speaking of your accomplishments and skills, use a specific example. For each question, answer the question and then give an example that backs it up. This is not a theoretical discussion of the topics at hand. Interviewers want to know what you will actually be like in a work environment. However, keep in mind that is also your marketing pitch, select stories that paint you in a positive light.

General Interviewing Tips

Arrival and Introduction

- Turn off your cell phone before arriving for the interview.
- Arrive 15 minutes early. If feasible, consider conducting a dry run to the location of the interview in advance to determine travel time, potential traffic delays, and the distance between parking lot and office.
- Do not bring anything to eat or drink into the interview with you.
- Greet your interviewer by name; make good eye contact, smile, and offer a firm handshake.
- Remember that you are being evaluated by everyone you meet, whether in the waiting area, elevator, or parking lot. Be courteous and respectful to everyone you come in contact with.

During the Interview

- Listen carefully to each question and let the interviewer finish asking the question before you begin your answer.
- Support your responses to questions with specific examples from your experiences. By doing so, you'll demonstrate your accomplishments and skills rather than just stating them.
- Be aware of your body language; sit up straight, lean slightly forward, maintain good eye contact, smile, don't fidget, speak confidently and positively.
- Don't ask about salary; let the employer bring it up. If asked about your salary expectations, state that you are most interested in the opportunity and you trust that the applicant selected will be offered a competitive salary. If pressed for an amount, give a salary range rather than a specific number.
- Thank the interviewer(s) for their time, offer a handshake, and let them know that you look forward to hearing from them.

After the Interview

Send a thank you email or handwritten note within 24 hours to each person you met with during the interview. An email is acceptable but some people appreciate a handwritten note. Conversely, if the employer is working remotely an email will reach them much faster than a handwritten note. If a hiring decision is going to be made within a few days it is more appropriate to send an email so that it is received quickly. Thank the interviewer for their time and restate your interest in the position.

If you have not heard from the organization within the timeframe you were given, wait a few extra days and then call or email once to follow up. Reiterate your interest in the position and ask when they anticipate making a decision. If no timeframe was discussed at the interview, following up after one week is appropriate.

Schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Career Center if you want to discuss the interview, strategize for answering questions on future interviews, or learn about evaluating a job offer and/or negotiating salary.

Professional Dress

The main goal of the interview attire is to make a good professional first impression without having anything about your appearance draw focus from the content of your interview. Your professional appearance and presentation will leave a lasting impression...make it a positive one! Standards of dress vary by industry; the following are general recommended guidelines:

Everything should fit well, be ironed, and clean. Clothing should have a conservative neckline and appropriate length skirt or pant length (not too short or too long)

A conservative, dark, two-piece skirt or pant-suit (navy, charcoal, black).

Dressy conservative top or light-colored long-sleeved tucked-in dress shirt with a conservative tie and a belt.

Wear either dark socks and polished dress shoes, or neutral colored stockings (no bare legs) and close-toed shoes that complement the color of your suit. If you wear a belt, match it to your shoes.

You should be clean, and well-groomed. Wear minimal neutral jewelry, perfume/cologne, nail color and makeup. Make sure body piercing, facial hair, and tattoo coverage align with company culture/standards.

Preparing Questions to Ask

At the conclusion of the interviewers' questions, you will usually be asked if you have any questions for them. You should plan to ask them some questions. If you have no questions to ask, you might appear disinterested in the position. Prepare relevant and insightful questions in advance of the interview to demonstrate your enthusiasm and to let the interviewer know that you have done your research. You may also add questions about information that was shared during the interview that you would like to know more about.

The following sample questions can be used in addition to your own questions based on your research:

What do you like best about working here?

What have employees done to succeed in this position in the past?

What does a typical day look like?

I know your mission is _____ can you tell me how it is put into action by this department?

How would you describe the corporate/organizational culture?

What are the opportunities you see for the department/company/organization in the next year?

What type of training is provided for new employees?

How are employees evaluated and how is success measured?

What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?

In six months' time, how will you know if you've hired the right person?

What are the trends that will influence the company in the near future?

How is the collaboration among departments?

How do you describe your management style?

Is there anything else I can do or provide to help you make your decision?

Do not ask questions that can be easily answered by viewing the company's website.

Do not ask about salary or benefits. Wait until the employer brings it up or makes the job offer.

Do not ask how you did during the interview or if you got the job. It is at the top of your mind but it comes off needy.

Do not ask the interviewer personal questions about themselves.

One of the most important questions to ask is "What is the next step in the hiring process?" or "What is your timeline for filling the position?" This demonstrates your interest in the position and the answer will help you organize and manage your job search. If you leave without learning about their anticipated process, you will be left hanging. It will also tell you how quickly you will need to write them thank-you notes.

Illegal Questions

Employers are prohibited by law from asking you any personal information that is not related to the position you are being interviewed for. Employers may not ask questions about your race, gender, religion, ethnicity, marital status, sexual preference, disabilities, or age unless any of these factors would prevent you from being able to perform the job.

If you are asked an illegal question during an interview you may choose to answer the question if you are comfortable to do so and if you believe it will not affect your candidacy for the position. If you are not comfortable answering the question, tell the interviewer that you don't see how the question relates to the position and politely ask them to explain the relevance.

Need Help with Interviewing?

The Career Center helps with preparing for interviews. We offer mock interviews, where you will pretend to interview you for a position and then we give you individualized feedback about your practice interview. You can even ask to have this mock interview recorded, so that you review how you came across. We offer general assistance for preparing for interviews, evaluating job offers, and negotiating salary.