

Successful Interviewing

Career Development

Room M120

Monday–Friday: 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

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The Successful Interview

Your application materials can advance you to a first round interview, but an eventual hiring decision will depend on how you perform in an interview. Just as you would prepare for an exam, preparation is key for a successful interview. Company research, professionalism, attitude, and being able to articulate your strengths all come into play.

Analyze the position:

Review a copy of the job description and highlight the qualifications and main responsibilities. Employers with a lengthy list of qualifications rarely find applicants who are strong in all areas, so do not get discouraged if you do not meet all the specified requirements. Emphasize your strengths, transferable skills, and the qualifications you *do* meet. Focus on what you can do.

Research the employer or organization:

Learn as much as you can about the employer's mission, services, products, and future endeavors. Understand how this organization compares with similar or competing organizations. Start your research with the employer's website, but also explore other avenues of information: LinkedIn, articles or news search results on Google, career fairs, employer information sessions (if available), and by tapping into your network—reach out to faculty, and/or Career Development. Find out as much information as you can.

Review your experiences:

While you cannot prepare for every possible interview question, you can prepare for common interview questions to help you create a handful of responses. It is important to think through your experiences and qualifications and identify the skills and knowledge you have developed. Many skills are transferable from one setting to another (for example, customer service from a retail position can be related to how you would handle client interactions).

Have a handful of real-life examples to discuss during the interview. Think through concrete ways you have demonstrated the necessary skills and qualifications to match the position and the company's mission. These can be related to many different questions, even if the question does not directly ask about that particular experience. Remember that everyone will say they are skilled—you need to be able to prove that you are.

Practice, practice, practice:

It's normal to be nervous before an interview. Practice with your advisor, a faculty member, friends, family, or schedule a **mock interview session** with Career Development. This will allow you to get valuable feedback on various components of your interviewing skills (content, organization of answers, and presentation style).

You can also practice on your own. Rehearse your responses to potential questions out loud. You can stand in front of a mirror to assess your facial expression and body language. Also consider using your phone to film your responses and review your presentation to see if you need to adjust your delivery, body language, tone of voice, etc.

Interview Tips

- When the company calls you for an interview, ask whom the interview will be with and also ask for a contact name and number if they do not provide one.
- Arrive fifteen minutes early for an interview. If possible, scout the location before the interview so you know where you are going.
- Always be nice to the receptionist—the interview begins when you enter the front door and continues until you leave the front door again!
- Dress professionally. As a general rule, no matter what the company culture, it is better to be overdressed than to be underdressed.
- Bring a notepad for notes; however, do not take notes during the interview. Following the interview, write down key points to be added in your thank you note.
- Bring five clean copies of your resume with a separate page of references.
- Prepare at least three good questions to ask during the interview.
- Ask for business cards if the interviewer does not give them to you—it will come in handy when you are writing thank you notes.
- It's okay to ask the interviewer to repeat the question if you did not understand what they were asking.
- Remember, a little bit of silence in an interview is alright. If you are not sure exactly how to answer a question, do not rush into it. It is alright to say, "That's a great question, Ms. Smith..." and then take a few seconds to think of a great answer.
- Do not bring up salary or benefits. If asked, never give an exact salary, always give a range.
- Make sure that you have pieces in your portfolio that you can show no matter what the technology is like at the company you are applying with. You never know if their system is down.
- When going over your portfolio, be prepared to discuss the concepts behind your projects.
- Remember to maintain good eye contact throughout the interview.
- Ask for a timeline regarding filling the position.
- As you wrap up the interview, always try to give yourself a reason to follow up with the interviewer. For example, you might want to say something like "Thank you again for your time, Ms. Smith. You mentioned earlier that you will be interviewing through the end of this week. I am extremely interested in this opportunity; would it be alright if I followed up with you sometime next week?"

10 Common Interview Questions

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

Talk about your experiences, qualifications, and accomplishments—not your childhood, family, or hobbies. You can discuss what led you to be interested in this career path.

What do you know about the company?

Employers want to know that you have researched their company and learned more about them. Show that you understand the company's goals, products, and endeavors, and then personalize it by sharing why you are drawn to their company in particular and how you can support their goals.

Why do you want to work here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you have given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening.

What are your goals?

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals. Regardless, be truthful.

What are your strengths? How do people describe you?

List three to five characteristics to describe yourself that show a good fit for the position. Also share a few real-life examples of how you have demonstrated these characteristics. Share your old performance appraisals and boss' quotes.

What are your challenges (weaknesses)?

This is the most dreaded question of all. Handle it by emphasizing your strengths. Stay away from personal qualities and concentrate on professional traits. Interviewers are trying to gauge self-awareness and honesty with this question. Keep it positive! Focus on something you struggle with and how you have taken steps to improve or correct that area of weakness. Do not mention any challenges (weaknesses) that are considered requirements for the position.

When were you most satisfied in your job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences.

Why should we hire you?

Summarize your experiences and emphasize your interest in this particular company and position. Your answer should cover three points: how can you do the work and deliver great results, how will you fit in with the team and workplace culture, and what qualities make you a better hire than other candidates. Provide concrete statements and examples.

What can you do for us that other candidates can't?

What makes you unique and sets you apart from other candidates? Assess your experiences, skills, and traits. Summarize concisely.

What salary are you seeking?

It is to your advantage if the employer tells you a range first. Prepare by knowing the going rate in your geographic area.

Additional Frequently Asked Interview Questions

The Company and the Job

- Why are you interested in this company?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What is your knowledge of the position for which you are applying?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- What characteristics do you think this job requires?
- What do you think are the most important skills needed to do this job?
- In what ways do you think you can contribute to this company?
- What qualities will support a person's success in this job?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between supervisor and subordinates.
- What would you change about our company if hired?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?
- Are you willing to work overtime?
- Why should I hire you?

Education and Training

- Did you fully apply yourself as a student?
- Describe a major class and/or internship project.
- Why did you select your college?
- What led you to choose your major/field of study?
- What college subjects did you like most or least?
- How has college contributed to your personal and professional development?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- Do you plan to further your education?

Leadership, Organization, and Planning

- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are your career goals?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in three to five years?
- What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- Which is more important to you, the money or the job?
- How did you choose your major in college?
- What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?
- What were the responsibilities of your last job?
- How do you schedule your workday?
- When you are given a major project, how do you go about getting it done?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- If you were in charge of a team project, how would you organize and delegate responsibilities?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What applied theories and concepts would you use in this position?

Technical Skills and Qualifications

- What computer skills and knowledge can you bring to this position?
- What kind of equipment can you operate?
- With which computer languages are you familiar, and can you program in any of them?
- What qualifications make you feel that you will be successful in your career?
- If hired, what special abilities would you bring to this position?

Maturity, Judgment, and Poise

- Tell me about yourself...
- How would you describe yourself?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Describe a difficult situation you encountered at work.
- How do you work under pressure?
- What have you learned from previous experience?
- In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested?
- From what accomplishments have you derived the most satisfaction?
- How did previous employers treat you?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- Describe your most recent supervisor.
- What did you like or dislike about that supervisor?
- How would you describe your ideal job?

Behavioral Interviewing Questions

These questions are based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. For example, if you have shown initiative in a club or class project, you are likely to show initiative when you are working. Many employers are using this technique of “behavioral interviewing”. They ask a question that requires the candidate to state a behavior. These questions often start with “Tell me a time...”. Have real-life examples prepared. Most of these questions focus on a specific skill, such as communication skills, or how you handle working with others. You may be asked about your initiative, leadership, planning and organization, ability to meet deadlines, flexibility, creativity, innovations, and decision-making.

Conflict Resolution:

Tell me about a personal conflict you have faced at work, and how you dealt with it.

The interviewer is trying to get a sense of how you handle conflict and other personalities. Focus on how you handled the situation professionally and productively, any conflict management skills you used (such as active listening), and how it was resolved.

- Describe a situation in which you were disappointed with your performance.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to successfully overcome personality conflicts in order to achieve results.
- Describe a situation in which a person in a position of authority tested your ability to influence them.
- Tell me about a time when you realized, after completing a task or project, that your team made a mistake. What did you do?
- Describe a time where you experienced clear tension or conflict with another co-worker, supervisor, or work acquaintance.
- Tell me about a time in which it was critical for you to maintain the confidentiality of a co-worker.
- Describe your most difficult experience communicating with someone.
- Describe a situation where you had to give an open, honest, and candid response to a tough issue.
- Tell me about a time when you had to support a project led by someone who was very difficult to get along with.
- Tell me about a time when you had to challenge the status quo.

Coping Mechanisms & Versatility:

Describe a time when you had significant stress or pressure.

Every job has its own stressors. Your answers should demonstrate how you meet a stressful situation head-on, any healthy stress management techniques you use, and how you accomplish your goals or meet deadlines.

- Describe an aspect of your current job that reflects your ability to work under pressure.
- Describe a situation in which a customer or co-worker has caused you to behave with less maturity and professionalism than usual.
- Describe how you managed your time on an unusually hectic day.
- Do you plan in advance, and if so, how far? Describe a situation in which you benefited by planning.
- Describe a situation in which you demonstrated the ability to “go with the flow”.
- Tell me about a time when you received some difficult feedback.

Leadership:

When have you demonstrated leadership?

Your answers should display your overall leadership experience and potential.

- Describe a situation in which you made a sacrifice in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had to take responsibility for something that went wrong.
- Describe a time when you provided constructive feedback to a direct report who was not carrying their weight on a team or a project.
- Tell me about a time when it was important for you to keep others informed in order to meet a deadline.
- Tell me about a time in which you were working with a team and it was necessary to make a collaborative decision, yet there did not appear to be consensus in the group.
- Tell me about the last time that you empowered an individual to take on a highly visible project or task.
- Describe a situation where planning ahead led to a decision with positive results.

Task and Self-Management:

Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself.

Your answers should demonstrate how you manage multiple responsibilities, prioritize and organize your workflow, and meet deadlines.

- Tell me about a time you improved the process involved in a daily task.
- Tell me about a time when you had more to do than time would allow.
- Describe a situation in which it was necessary to delegate some of your own tasks to others on your team in order to make room on your plate for other key initiatives.

Decision-Making and Problem-Solving:

Tell me about a time you provided a creative solution.

Your answers should illuminate how you have shown innovation and problem-solving skills. Be sure to describe the challenge, how you came up with a creative solution, and the results.

- Some creative individuals require a stimulating environment to facilitate their productivity. Other creative personalities seem to be productive regardless of their immediate work environment. Describe a situation which indicates which type you are.
- Describe the types of activities in your last job that enhanced your creativity.
- Describe a situation in which your skills were not a match for the problem you were attempting to solve.
- Describe a situation which indicates whether you are more logical or intuitive in solving problems.
- Tell me about a time when you had to make an important decision rather quickly and without a lot of information or data.
- Tell me about a time when someone asked you to do something you felt was a stretch for your skill set; in other words, something you felt somewhat “underqualified” to take on.

Unlawful Interview Questions

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC) limits employers in the type of questions they may ask candidates. It is unlawful for employers to ask for the following information prior to hiring an applicant:

- Maiden name of a married woman.
- Original name of an applicant whose name has been changed by court order or otherwise.
- Whether the applicant rents or owns their own home.
- Birthplace of applicant.
- Birthplace of applicant's parents, spouse, or close relatives.
- Photograph of the applicant.
- Information on how the applicant acquired fluency in a foreign language.
- Information regarding military experience or type of discharge.
- Memberships in clubs, societies, and lodges that are not job-related.
- Complexion, coloring, or color of skin.
- Whether an applicant has been arrested.
- Whether the applicant has a disability.
- Whether the applicant has been treated for any diseases.
- Medical condition or history.
- Physical defects or impairments.
- Treatment by a psychiatrist or psychologist.
- Treatment for drug addiction or alcoholism.
- History of mental condition.
- Whether the applicant is taking prescribed drugs.
- Whether the applicant has ever filed a Workers Compensation claim.
- How many times the applicant has been absent from a job because of illness.
- Marital status.
- Employment of spouse.
- Ages of children.
- Childcare arrangements.
- Intention to have more children.
- Names, addresses, or other information concerning applicant's children or other relatives.
- Age or date of birth - However, asking if you are over 18 is legal.
- Date of high school graduation.
- Citizenship or citizenship of parents.
- Religious denomination.
- Religious affiliations, church, parish, pastor, or religious holidays observed Note: *Faith based organizations are permitted to assert your religious beliefs as considered a bona fide occupational qualification.*
- Information about the applicant's lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent, parentage, or nationality.
- Gender of applicant.

Questions to Ask Interviewers

1. How would you describe the company/organizational culture or atmosphere?
2. What are the future plans for the organization?
3. What is the company structure?
4. Has there been recent growth in certain areas of the organization?
5. What are the opportunities for professional development (advancement)?
6. What is the process for advancement?
7. What other people or departments would I be working with?
8. How will I be supervised? Will I be supervising others? How many?
9. In what area does the organization excel or have limitations?
10. What does the actual job entail? (Ask specific questions about the job responsibilities.)
11. Can you tell me about the training provided?

Interview Self Evaluation and Notes:

Company: _____

This is interview: 1st 2nd 3rd Final

Company Description: _____

Interviewer(s): _____

Title on Business Card: _____

Department: _____

Address: _____

Names and Titles of additional contact: _____

Thank You Letter Sent: YES NO

Position Applied for: _____ Reports to: _____

Job Description: _____

Rate Yourself:

Grooming/clothing choice	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Promptness	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Knowledge of company and industry	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Knowledge of specific job	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
General info related to the field	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Resume and portfolio	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Ability to respond to behavioral Q's	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Overall comfort level	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Skills and qualification	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Interest in specific job	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Interest in the company	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Personal satisfaction with the interview	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Questions I answered really well: _____

What were the most difficult questions: _____

My thoughts after the interview, any additional information learned during the interview: _____

Why I think I am “fit” or not “fit” for this company/job: _____

What the interviewer seemed to find the most positive: _____

What the interviewer seemed to find most negative: _____

What the interviewer said that made the biggest impression on me & why: _____

How I rate the interviewer & why: _____

Things I did right: _____

Things I did wrong: _____

What I need to improve: _____

What I learned that I can use again: _____

What I improved over my last interview: _____

The next step: _____

What to remember for the next step: _____
