



Interviewing

The Purpose of the Interview

The interview is an opportunity for an employer or a 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, his or her strengths and communication skills, and to determine which applicants will be invited for additional interviews. Screening interviews can be conducted through on-campus recruiting, by Skype 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.

Tips for Skype Interviews

- Dress professionally
- Check your Internet connection in advance of the interview
- Familiarize yourself with Skype's features in advance
- Find a quiet place free from background noise and distraction, and turn off cell phone
- Be ready and waiting at your computer 15 minutes early
- Make eye contact with the camera, not the screen
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Make a list of highlights you want to share
- Have a copy of your resume in front of you

Tips for Phone Interviews

- Find a quiet place free from background noise and distraction
- When possible, use a landline; otherwise be sure you have a strong phone signal
- Be ready and waiting 15 minutes early
- Answer the incoming call with your name. "Hello, this is John Doe"
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes
- Smile throughout the interview; a smile can be heard in your voice
- Be sure to clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place

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 notes exam, you can be looking at the organization's website or your own notes while you are speaking with the interviewer.

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 an in-person interview.

iPhone Facetime Interviews

Apple's FaceTime, both of which let people video-chat over the internet with the use of cameras is part of technology referred to as video-telephony. Once seldom utilized for interviewing, video-conferencing is becoming an increasingly popular alternative to a phone interview.

Pros

There are a few pros to being able to see the interviewer, but one of the most important is gauging body language. Essentially, all the small and nuanced things you'd normally be able to pick up on in an in-person interview you'll get a preview of here. It's potentially also advantageous to see your interviewer's surroundings. Also, do they seem like a person you would enjoy working with? These can all provide clues to assess if this would be a good fit.

Cons

Frankly, there are two significant cons to interviewing via FaceTime media. First, there's no guarantee the employer has an Apple iPhone or is unfamiliar with the technology. Second, iPhone runs off of a cellular network and connections may vary based on signal and location.

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. 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.

Preparing for Interviews

For Graduate and Professional School Interviews

Research the college or university and the specific program you're applying to. 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 Company

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.

Know Your Skills and Strengths

It is important to enter the interview process with knowledge of 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 they are looking for. Always use examples of situations where you have demonstrated these skills and strengths.

Strengths are personal characteristics that make you valuable as an employee.

Examples: Dependable, Flexible, Creative, Diligent, Loyal

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

Examples: Communication Skills, Analytical Skills, Problem-solving Skills, Managerial Skills

Prepare Answers to 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 want the position for which you are being interviewed.

Sample questions include:

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.

What accomplishments are you most proud of?

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.

Why are you interested in our company/this position?

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

How do you measure success?

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

What are your short term and long term career goals?

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

What do you need from a supervisor?

When speaking of your accomplishments and skills, use a specific example to illustrate your examples.

Answer potentially negative questions by demonstrating how you learned from the experience and that you took responsibility for any mistakes.

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.

S.T.A.R. Method:

An effective way to answer behavioral 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 members 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."

Sample behavioral questions:

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.

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

Describe a situation when you had to motivate others.

Tell me about a time when you had to work with someone with whom you didn't get along.

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?

General Interviewing Tips

Arrival and Introduction

- Turn off your cell phone before arriving for the interview.
- Arrive 15 minutes early. If feasible, consider conduct 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.
- At the end of the interview ask when you can expect to hear from them regarding the position if they haven't already told you. Thank the interviewer(s) for his/her time, offer a handshake, and let him/her 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 most people appreciate 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 his/her time and restate your interest in the position.

If you have not heard from the organization within the timeframe you were given, call or email 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

First impressions are extremely important in the interview process. 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:

For Men – A conservative, dark, two-piece suit (navy, charcoal, black), light colored long sleeved dress shirt, tie, belt, dark socks, and polished dress shoes.

For Women – A conservative, dark pant or skirt suit with a light colored blouse, neutral colored stockings (no bare legs), close-toed shoes with a moderate heel that complement the color of your suit.

For Both – Clean, well-groomed fingernails, conservative hairstyle, neatly pressed clothing, minimal jewelry, light fragrance, if any, briefcase or portfolio with extra copies of your resume, list of references, and a pad of paper on which to take notes.

Preparing Questions to Ask

At the conclusion of the interviewer's questions, you will usually be asked if you have any questions for them. If you have no questions to ask, you will 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:

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 are the primary challenges for the department/organization?

Is this a new position? If not, why did the previous employee leave?

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 your plans for maintaining or improving the company/organization's national ranking?

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?

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

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

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 offers assistance with preparing for interviews. Students can use our online video interview system, InterviewStream, to practice interviewing and review their responses with a career counselor. Counselors provide feedback about your strengths and strategies for improving your skills for a successful interview. InterviewStream can be accessed through the Career Center's homepage. We also offer mock interviews in our office and general assistance for preparing for interviews, evaluating job offers, and negotiating salary.