

INTERVIEWING HOW-TO GUIDEBOOK



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Introduction

Interviewing is an opportunity to express your interest in a specific position, highlight your knowledge about an employer, and show your qualifications for your desired position. It is important to make a positive impression on your interviewers and following the suggestions throughout this how-to guide will provide the tools and strategies to prepare for an interview.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Accepting the Interview

- Write down the date, time, and place of the interview in addition to the interviewer's contact information.
- Gather and review your application materials.
- Practice answering mock-interview questions.

Clean and Neat

- Be freshly showered and practice proper hygiene prior to the interview.
- Be mindful of your appearance; anything could distract an interviewer from paying attention to your qualifications (i.e., facial hair, heavy colognes/perfumes, jewelry).
 - **Men:** Wear a clean, pressed suit and tie, long pants and shined black or brown dress shoes with black socks.
 - **Women:** Wear a clean, pressed suit (pants or skirt). Skirts should be no shorter than 1" above the knee. Wear polished dress shoes (heels <2" high or flats). Hair should be neatly arranged.
- If in doubt, consider erring on the side of conservative dress.

Make a Good First Impression

- Be on time – Plan to arrive (or log on) 10 – 15 minutes before the interview begins. For an in-person interview, practice your route if in doubt.
- Extend a firm handshake and use appropriate salutation (Mr./Ms./Dr.)
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer during your greeting and throughout the interview.
- Turn off your cell phone or put it on silent.

Prepare Materials

- Organize a professional portfolio to carry documents and take notes (a nicely bound notebook or folder is appropriate, as well). Include:
 - Copies of your resume
 - A list of your references
 - Any requested documentation
 - A writing utensil
 - Paper to write on
 - Samples of work, if necessary

Practice

- Read and re-read the position description.
- Begin brainstorming how your skills, experiences, strengths, and knowledge relate to the position. Upon reflection, consider writing down your ideas to reference.
- Ask a friend, roommate, family member, or the Career Center to run through a mock interview with you. The more you practice, the stronger your interview skills become.
- Review the following page for tips on how to answer interview questions effectively.

Do you need professional clothing? The Mount's Career Closet offers free professional attire. Contact the Career Center for more information.

THE INTERVIEW: ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EFFECTIVELY

STAR Technique

Consider using this technique to help you organize responses to behavioral questions:

SITUATION – What was the **situation**?

TASK – What **task(s)** did you identify that had to be completed?

ACTION – What **action** did you take?

RESULT – What was the **result** of your actions?

Always be honest about your accomplishments and abilities. Plan to discuss:

- Skills and abilities
- Relevant college coursework and projects
- Sports, clubs, and activities
- Leadership roles, on and off campus
- Previous, relevant work experience

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below are common interview questions and suggestions on how to respond.

Question: Tell me about yourself.

- Keep your answer brief (1-2 minutes).
- Give a short overview of yourself, including your relevant goals, skills, and background.
- Focus on the skills, experiences, and education you have relevant to this specific position within the organization.
- Express why you are interested in the position.

Question: What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- **Strengths:** State three specific strengths (i.e., communication, leadership, time management) and their relevancy to the position. Give a **specific example** of your strength in action to provide evidence of your ability, skill, or knowledge.
- **Weaknesses:** List a weakness you are actively working to improve. Make sure this is not a weakness that directly disqualifies you from a position (for example, we advise you not to state you are disorganized as you are interviewing for an accounting internship position). Employers want to see that you are self-aware and are taking steps to grow.

Question: Why are you interested in our organization / What interest you about this job?

- Share an informed interest and passion. Know the organization's mission, products, size, clientele served (if applicable), reputation, and history.
- Follow up by sharing how your experiences can contribute to, support, and impact the organization and role you are interviewing for.

Question: Where do you see yourself in five years?

- Demonstrate how this position fits into your short and long-term goals.
- Provide a realistic answer by researching the structure of the organization and identifying where entry-level employees progress.
- Before sharing graduate school plans, research whether the employer supports further education. Typically, educational benefits are to be discussed after an offer of employment has been made.

Question: What experiences have prepared you to be succeed in a position like this one?

- Relate your experiences (work, volunteer, research, activities) to the requirements of this position.
- Share specific examples which apply to your desired position.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AN EMPLOYER

It is essential to have questions prepared to ask your interviewer(s). In addition to seeking more information about an employer, asking questions highlights your interest and shows your investment.

General Questions

- What specific skills or qualities are especially important for someone in this position to have?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?
- What kind of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
- What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
- What are your growth projections for the next year?
- What are some opportunities for improvement in your organization?
- What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
- When can I expect to receive a follow up from my interview today?
- Could I have your contact details or business card?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion-Focused Questions

Gaining insight into the culture of an organization is essential during the interview process. You want to determine if the employer provides a space that feels welcoming and inclusive of yourself and others. Some questions to ask may include:

- How would you describe the company's culture?
- You mentioned – or on your website you mention – [the employer] has a commitment to diversity. How has the organization demonstrated that commitment?
- What does diversity and inclusion mean here?
- What resources do you [the employer] have to support individuals with marginalized identities?
- How do you celebrate diversity of ideas and people?
- Are there any specific internal DE&I groups, resources, or initiatives you are particularly proud of?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a prompt thank-you note for the interview; email is appropriate as well as a hand-written card.
- Follow up regarding your status in the process if the employer has not contacted you within the agreed upon time frame (you can initiate contact and ask if a hiring decision has been made).
- Continue applying for additional opportunities.
- Evaluate your interviewing performance to learn from your experience.
- **Don't give up!**

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS: VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

Practice Makes Perfect

Your first video calls may feel awkward as you figure out where to look, what to do with your hands, or how loudly to speak. Do a practice interview with a friend. Record yourself and get a better idea about how you come across on video. Practice until you get comfortable and are happy with what you see.

Prepare Your Surroundings

Find a quiet businesslike setting to conduct your call. A cluttered background can be distracting. Keep away from personal items and aim for a neutral background. Also, make sure everyone knows you are in an interview to help avoid interruptions or excessive background noise. The Career Center has private interview rooms for students to book. Contact the Career Center and ask to reserve a room.

Look the Part

Experts say that 90% of the cues we give off are non-verbal. Do research on what the company might want to see in an employee. It's always better to look clean and professional. Even if your bottom half isn't showing, dress it up to ensure you have a totally professional mindset.

Smile!

At an in-person interview, smiling comes naturally upon arrival and initial meeting. When you are not interacting with a person, it might be easy to let your face slip into other unconscious expressions. Don't be nervous and try to get yourself to smile before the interview so it comes a little easier than forcing yourself to smile at a computer.

Stay Present

Periodic clues that you are still interested in what the employer is saying is a good idea. Avoid typing or using your computer for other things. That typing noise can come through loud and clear sometimes and will scream "not listening."

Clear Up Tech Problems

Tech problems can lead to miscommunications. If there is a problem that persists, bring it up. Asking to reconnect shows the employer that you are a problem-solver.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS: PHONE INTERVIEWS

Take Advantage

The employer can't see you, and as much as that can be a setback in communication of body language or facial expression, it also gives you the chance to have notes in front of you. Print out a copy of your resume to have in front of you, make a list of questions you want to ask, take notes, or use the internet for last-minute research.

Give Yourself Time

An interview during a lunch break is always a bad idea. The more of a time restriction you put on the interview, the more stressful the interview will likely be. Remember, the longer your interview takes, the better you're doing. Give yourself a minimum of 30 minutes free to avoid having to cut off the conversation.

Control Your Environment

Make sure to make or take the call in an environment where you will not be distracted or interrupted. Use a landline or ensure you have enough reception. Consider reserving a Career Center interview room for your interview.

Etiquette

To avoid an awkward start to the interview, make sure to answer the phone with your name. This will help you start the interview off confidently. Remember to smile while talking. Smiling brings energy to your voice and will help get enthusiasm across. Also, if there is a distraction, be honest about it. Being intentional is better than seeming disinterested.

Mute Button

Another way to take advantage of a phone interview is to make effective use of the mute button. Whether it is a sip of water, a quick moment to use the computer, or time to deal with a situation outside the interview, muting can be very helpful. However, it is a good idea to test your mute button to see if the person on the other line gets an indication if it has been activated.

It's normal to feel anxious for an interview! Know you are not alone in your experience. The Career Center is happy and willing to provide support to you while you navigate the world of interviewing.

Consider scheduling an appointment to discuss interview skills and to prepare for an upcoming interview.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

Things to Avoid

- Poor personal appearance
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm
- Over-emphasis on money
- Condemnation of past employers
- Lack of eye contact
- Limp handshake
- Unwillingness to go where sent
- Being late
- Unappreciativeness
- Not asking questions at the end of an interview
- Indefinite responses to questions
- Overbearing, over-aggressive, "know-it-all" complex
- Inability to express oneself clearly
- Lack of planning for career (no purpose or goals)
- Lack of confidence
- Excuses
- Lying
- Lack of manners and common courtesy
- Merely shopping around

Additional Reminders

- Be proactive throughout the interview process
- Be prepared – come to the Career Center to help prepare you for an interview
- Create a network of relationships with your peers, professors, and professionals
- Whenever you meet someone new, always try to leave a good first impression
- Ask questions and get support when you need or want a second opinion

Schedule an appointment with the Career Center today!



msmary.joinhandshake.com/appointments/new

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