

Interviewing Guide

Securing a spot as a top candidate and receiving an invitation to interview is an exciting but likely the most nerve-racking part of the job search. This guide is designed to offer information and tips regarding what to do before, during, and after the interview.

Before the Interview

Just like exams, the best way to ace your upcoming interview is to prepare as soon and thoroughly as possible; do not procrastinate! Following the five Ps, **proper preparation prevents poor performance**, is the most effective way to make sure you are ready for the interview.

Understand the Position

The very first step to your preparation is to be sure that you understand the position. If you do not yet have a complete job description, including the required and preferred qualifications, be sure to ask for this document. You will be expected to understand and share your knowledge of the position during the interview.

Research the Employer

The interviewer(s) will expect you to know information about the organization's mission, programs, services, products, clients, and the industry in which they operate. Use the employer's website, information on the Internet (Google search), and the organization's marketing material to gather information. The organization's annual report is often posted online and is an excellent resource for reviewing achievements, goals, and areas for growth and improvement. Also, be sure to research information about the interviewer's professional interests and accomplishments.

Complete a Self-Assessment

Answering interview questions becomes easier if you have a thorough knowledge of yourself. Be prepared to share information within the following areas:

- **Skills and abilities** - identify those that reflect what the employer is looking for
- **Experience** - explain how your prior work and internship experience supports the job description
- **Career goals** - include short and long term goals and your desire to grow within the organization
- **Values and interests** - discuss what motivates you professionally
- **Education** - relay how your degree and classroom experiences will help you succeed professionally

Before the Interview

Practice Interviewing

With your research in place, practicing answering common interview questions will help ease your nerves and build your confidence. To help you, the Office of Career Services offers in-person and virtual mock interviews with [Optimal Interview software](#), as what you say can be as equally important as how you say it. Practice non-verbal elements like maintaining eye contact, smiling when appropriate, sitting up straight, leaning forward to convey interest, and offering a firm handshake.

Interview questions are often either conversational or behavioral. **Conversational** interview questions are generally open-ended and are designed to engage the interviewee in back and forth dialogue. **Behavioral** questions seek to develop an understanding of your past actions and behaviors in particular situations, as your prior behavior will likely predict your future behavior.

A list of conversational questions is provided below:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me about your experience.
- What is your most important accomplishment to date?
- How would you describe your ideal job?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What goals do you have in your career?
- How do you plan to achieve these goals?
- How do you personally define success?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Would you rather work with information or with people?
- Are you a team player?
- What motivates you?
- Why should I hire you?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now? Ten?
- Do you handle pressure well?
- What is your greatest strength? Greatest weakness?
- If I asked boss to describe you, what would he or she say?
- How has your education prepared you for your career?
- What were your favorite classes? Why?
- Do you enjoy doing independent research?
- Does your GPA reflect your ability?
- Do you have any plans for further education?
- What qualities do you feel a manager should have?
- Why do you want to work in the _____ industry?
- Why are you interested in our company?
- How familiar are you with the community we are in?
- Are you willing to relocate? In the future?
- Are you willing to travel? How much?
- What kind of salary are you looking for?

A list of behavioral questions is provided below:

- Tell me about a time when you dealt with strict deadlines.
- Give me an example of when you had to deal with interpersonal conflict or personal rejection.
- What has been your experience in working with conflicting, ambiguous, or delayed information? How did you cope?
- Describe a situation where you had to expedite your actions to make a decision.
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you made.
- Tell me about your most successful speech or presentation.
- Describe a time when you successfully pitched an idea to a supervisor.
- Give me an example of when you followed procedures even though it was not convenient.
- Tell me about a time when you used your analytical skills to identify potential problems at work.
- Tell me about a time when you took the initiative to set goals even when not prompted to do so by a supervisor.
- Tell me about the writing experiences you've had that you think will contribute to your ability to succeed at this job.
- Describe your experiences editing written documents.
- Give me an example of how your interpretations of verbal and non-verbal behavior helped you communicate.
- Share examples of time management techniques you use.
- Share a creative solution you used to address an issue.
- Explain a time when you were flexible to meet others' needs.
- Describe a time when you bent rules to accomplish a goal.
- Tell me about a time when your understanding of the organizational culture helped you achieve results.
- Tell me about your success in building team camaraderie.
- Explain a time when you were objective in spite of your emotions.
- Give me an example of your use of delegation.

Before the Interview

To help with preparing for behavioral questions, the STAR technique (**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult) can help you think of examples of past behaviors, while keeping the anecdotes you're sharing concise and relevant. The grid below may be used to help you brainstorm possible answers to behavioral questions.

Situation/Task	Action	Result
Describe a specific situation you encountered or task you were responsible for completing. Be sure your example provides sufficient detail for the interviewer to understand the context of your example.	Indicate the action you took to respond to the situation or task. This is the time to emphasize qualities and/or skills the interviewer is seeking in an employee.	Conclude your example with the result of your actions. If you were asked to share an example that might paint you in a negative light (ie: tell me about a time you were unsuccessful in meeting a goal), always follow up with what you have learned or how you will improve in the future.

Questions for the Employer

In addition to preparing for the interviewer's questions, you must also develop questions of your own to ask. Questions that reflect your knowledge of the position and organization are the best, but be sure not to ask questions that may easily be answered on the organization's website. As a general rule, questions about salary and benefits are not asked during the first interview but may typically be asked during the second interview or when you have been offered the position.

A list of questions you may like to ask is provided below:

- What are your immediate expectations for the person who would fill this position?
- What do you anticipate to be the most challenging aspect about this position?
- How will my work be evaluated and how often?
- Can you elaborate about the _____?
- Given your organization's mission to _____, how is success measured?
- In what area is your organization hoping to grow?

During the Interview

Arriving for the Interview

At this point, you should know with whom you are meeting, where you are going, how you will get there, and where you will park if you are driving. Mapping out a route and going on a dry-run is the best way to keep you from being late. If, in the unforeseen event, you are running late, be sure to have the interviewer's telephone number so you can call ahead. Generally speaking, arriving 10 minutes early allows you some time to collect your thoughts and indicates to the interviewer that you are a punctual person.

Making a Good First Impression

The first few moments are often considered to be the most crucial during an interview, as the interviewer will use this time to evaluate your appearance, personality, and professionalism. Begin the interview with a confident stride, firm handshake, good eye contact, and express your thanks for the opportunity to interview. Be prepared to also engage in some pleasant small talk.

Etiquette and Appearance

Generally speaking, interview etiquette suggests you follow the lead of the interviewer. Wait to be seated, or seat yourself after the interviewer has done so. Observe the tone and personality of the interviewer so as to adjust your tone and mannerisms to blend. Other obvious etiquette tips include turning off your cell phone, not chewing gum, bringing copies of your résumé, your questions, a pen and paper, and being friendly to everyone you encounter.

Men and women are expected to wear conservative business suits to the interview. Consider the purchase of your suit as a professional investment.

Additional tips for men and women are listed below:

Men:

- Wear a navy or gray suit that fits. Sleeves and pant legs that are too long or short are unprofessional and look bad. Spending the extra money for tailoring is always a good idea.
- Be sure clothing is free from wrinkles and stains.
- Wear a long sleeve, button down shirt in white or other light, muted color. Shirt sleeves should extend a quarter inch beyond the suit sleeve.
- Select a tie that has a conservative color and pattern. A medium sized-knot is appropriate.
- Sock color should match the color of your suit.
- Be sure shoes are shined and scuff free. Shoes should match the belt you are wearing.
- Avoid jewelry, including rings (one is appropriate), bracelets, necklaces, earrings, cuff links, and oversized watches.
- Conceal tattoos and minimize cologne.
- Shave or trim facial hair and be sure hair and nails are clean.

Women:

- Wear a dark colored suit that is tailored to fit you. Spending the extra money for a suit with a higher quality fabric is always a good idea.
- If you choose to wear a skirt, it should be knee-length and without a revealing slit in the back. Hosiery should be worn.
- Shirts may be button down or pull-over but should never be sheer, show cleavage, nor show midribs. Provocative clothing is not professional.
- Be sure shoes are flats or low heels and are closed-toe. Beware of wearing new shoes for the first time, as blisters may form and will cause discomfort.
- Avoid excessive, dangling, or flashy jewelry.
- Conceal tattoos, remove facial piercings, minimize perfume, and avoid brightly colored nails and makeup.
- Style hair in a professional, hassle-free manner away from your face.

Leaving the Interview

As the interview comes to a close, be sure to ask for the interviewer's business cards, which will help when addressing your thank you letter. End the interview with a firm handshake and again express your thanks for the opportunity to interview. It is appropriate to inquire about a time frame regarding when you may expect to hear back.

Wait until you have left the premises to turn on your cell phone, take off your jacket, change shoes, or let your hair down. The way you exit, just as the way you came in, will be evaluated.

After the Interview

Thank You Letter

A thank you letter or e-mail should be sent within 24 hours of the interview. If there was more than one interviewer, you may address it to the lead interviewer and extend your thanks to the others in the letter. Provided below is an explanation of the content for a thank you letter, as well as samples for your reference.

	Address City, State Zip (Area Code) Phone
Date	
Name of Addressee	
Title of Addressee	
Name of Organization	
Street Address or Box #	
City, State Zip	
Dear Addressee:	
Your opening paragraph should include a statement of gratitude for the opportunity to interview. A brief reflection on the interview or compliment about the organization would also be appropriately placed here.	
Your middle paragraph should include a statement of your continued interest in the position and a short reiteration of your qualifications. This is also the time to include a valuable piece of information that you did not cover during the interview	
In your closing paragraph, invite the interviewer(s) to contact you if they have any additional questions.	
Sincerely,	
Sign full name	
Type full name	

	1520 Washington Avenue New York, NY 10022 (212) 555-5463
July 1, 2010	
Dwayne Brown Principal Hudson River High School 1000 Madison Street New York, NY 10118	
Dear Mr. Brown:	
Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the Calculus Teacher position you have available. I enjoyed learning more about Hudson River High School, and I am impressed with your students' recent championship in the Downstate Calculus Competition.	
I welcome the possibility of becoming part of your dedicated Mathematics faculty, and I am confident my teaching experience at Utica City Schools and Master's degree from Utica College have prepared me to succeed in this position.	
Please extend my thanks to Ms. Clausen and Mr. Allendale as well. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you.	
Sincerely,	
<i>Janelle Stewart</i>	
Janelle Stewart	

1600 Burrstone Road Boehlert Hall, #403 Utica, NY 13502 (315) 981-5463 ssaffer@utica.edu	
August 18, 2010	
Kendra Basset Deputy to City Clerk Utica City Clerk's Office, City Hall 1 Kennedy Plaza Utica, NY 13502	
Dear Ms. Basset:	
Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me about the "Get Involved in Government Fall Internship Challenge." It was fascinating to learn more about how your office acts as the legislative and administrative backdrop of Utica's City Council.	
This opportunity complements my coursework as a Government and Politics major and my interest in participating in Utica's City Council meetings. I also neglected to mention that your need to provide technical support to the City Council is supported by my work experience at Utica College's Integrated Information Technology Services.	
If I can answer any additional questions you may have, please call (315) 981-5463. Again, it was a pleasure to meet you.	
Sincerely,	
<i>Sebastian Saffer</i>	
Sebastian Saffer	

EMAILED THANK YOU LETTER:
Dear Ms. Poloczak:
Thank you for setting aside time to meet with me personally. After hearing more about the Event Coordinator position, I am increasingly confident of my ability to contribute fresh and creative marketing ideas to promote your events. As a matter of fact, in response to our discussion on capturing a more youthful audience, it occurred to me that developing a free Facebook account may be the answer you are looking for!
I sincerely hope to have the opportunity to utilize my degree in Public Relations and former internship experience to your clients' benefit. If you should require any additional information or have questions, feel free to call or email.
Thank you, Katrina Kimski
<i>54 Elmwood Avenue Syracuse, NY 13202 Kkimski@utica.edu (315) 565-3210</i>

After the Interview

Following Up

It is permissible to call the interviewer after a week and inquire about your status as a candidate, especially if the interviewer has not provided you with a time frame regarding when the position will be filled. Refrain, however, from repeated phone calls.

Evaluating the Interview

Hopefully all your efforts in preparation result in a job offer. However, even with a flawless résumé, cover letter, thank you letter, and excellent rapport during the interview, only one person can be hired for the job. If that person wasn't you, use the interview as a learning experience and evaluate your performance.

A list of questions to ask yourself is provided below:

- How did the interview go?
- What went well?
- What do I need to improve upon?
- Did I seem nervous?
- Was I too talkative, not talkative enough?
- Was I too aggressive, too passive?
- Did I convey interest and enthusiasm?
- Did I highlight skills and qualifications appropriate to the position?
- Were my experiences and achievements thoroughly explained?
- How did I make myself stand out?
- Did I take the opportunity to emphasize my strengths?
- What points did I make that interested the interviewer?
- Was my knowledge of the organization evident?
- How were my questions received?

Expanding Your Network

If your interview went well but you weren't offered the job, don't be discouraged! By meeting people in the industry, you've just expanded your network. You may be considered for other employment opportunities within the organization in the future, or your name may even be passed along to the interviewer's colleagues in other organizations with a recommendation to consider you for their positions. Thus, be sure that you are always professional, and never bad mouth interviewers or the organization.

Career Services is Here to Help

In addition to mock and virtual interviews, the Office of Career Services welcomes you to ask any follow up questions regarding your interview. If you need advice on answering questions posed or even want a second opinion on your interview's self-evaluation, please don't hesitate to contact us.

GOOD LUCK!