

Employment Interviews

Job interviews are an opportunity for the employer to learn more about you and for you to learn more about the job and the company or organization. Employers use the interview to determine if you are qualified for their available position and whether you would be a good fit for their organization or unit. You should use the interview to highlight your most relevant skills and experience as well as gather information about the job and the organization, so that you can decide whether or not to accept an offer if one is made.

Different Types of Interviews



Telephone Interviews

Employers often use telephone interviews as a first step to determining whether or not you should be interviewed in person. Always be professional when you answer the phone because you never know when an employer may call. Ensure that your voicemail plays a professional-sounding message. Treat phone interviews as in-person interviews – dress professionally, be articulate and poised, and smile when you talk. If you treat the situation casually because the interviewer cannot see you, this will come across in the conversation even if you don't realize it.



Video Interviews

Many employers are now using video technology for interviews. This may happen in lieu of an initial phone interview, or in place of an in-person interview. Download the program (often Skype or Google Hangouts) as soon as you have a chance. Start using it in advance of the interview to understand how the program works and how you look and sound to the person you are speaking to. Make sure to sign up with a professional email address/user name, use a computer that has a working microphone and camera, and sit in a quiet, clean space with strong Internet connection. If you are struggling to meet any of these requirements, reach out to a Career Advancement adviser and we can help you find a room and/or laptop to use. Dress professionally, keep good posture, and speak clearly, and let the interviewer know politely if you are having trouble hearing or seeing them.



On-Campus Interviews

Certain employers interview applicants on campus, most frequently for business-related positions. These interviews usually follow a thirty-minute format: greeting and introductions, your background and interests, employer information and questions, a few minutes for your questions and closure. The same format is also often used for preliminary or “first-round” interviews off-campus.



On-Site Interviews

Site visits can range from short interviews to all day events and group interview situations. If possible, you may ask a recruiter what the format, agenda, and length of your on-site interview will be. Be sure you have all the travel information you need to make your visit go smoothly prepared in advance of your interview date. When you interact with the organization's employees, be polite to everyone, from the receptionist to upper-level managers, as well as other candidates interviewing with you. Keep in mind that you will be watched and evaluated throughout your visit, even during meals and social functions.





Employment Interviews

Interview Preparation

Preparing for an interview involves four steps: (1) knowing yourself, (2) research, (3) preparing responses and questions, and (4) practice.

- 1. Know Yourself:** Be able to identify your skills, interests, and goals that relate to the position. A thoughtful self-assessment enables you to target job opportunities that you are genuinely excited about and present yourself to the interviewer as a well directed, self confident individual who understands his or her own abilities and how they can be used. For help with self-assessment, make an appointment to see a Career Advancement Adviser or complete the “Career Exploration and Self Assessment” handout on the Career Advancement website.
- 2. Research:** The more you know about the employer, the more the interviewer will be convinced of your interest in the organization and position. Carefully read the job description and make sure you understand the responsibilities. Learn as much as you can about the mission, culture, size, structure, products and services, customers, current state, future direction, and the industry. You should also research the people who will be interviewing you. Ideally you will have done some informational interviews and networking before getting to this stage, which can equip you with insight on how best to showcase your knowledge and experience.
- 3. Preparing Responses and Questions:** The last part of preparation is strategy development. Interview responses are essentially mini-stories that you tell about yourself to convey to the employer that you can successfully do the job. As you prepare your responses to interview questions, think about how your prior experiences and current skills have prepared you for this job. Think broadly about your transferable skills, especially if you are breaking into a new field.

The STAR Method is an effective way to answer behavioral interview questions like “tell me about a time when you...?” The employer wants to see how you have handled yourself in the past in order to predict your performance and fit for this potential new opportunity. By following the STAR method, you can craft your mini-story by presenting a **SITUATION** that you encountered in your prior experience, describe the **TASKS** and **ACTIONS** you carried out to address that situation, and then summarize the **RESULTS** that you achieved.

Each mini-story you tell should highlight skills, knowledge, and ability that are relevant to the job you seek. Be sure to make an explicit connection between your prior experiences and the responsibilities of the job you want. The interviewer will likely give you a chance to ask questions as well. You should have some prepared that demonstrates you’ve “done your homework” and have a genuine interest in the position. Questions should go beyond information you could find on the website. Interviews are not an appropriate time to ask about salary, benefits, perks, or opportunities for advancement. You discuss these matters during negotiation.

- 4. Practice:** Presenting yourself effectively in an interview is a skill that you develop over time. Practice as much as you can before doing an actual interview. Career Advancement offers you several ways to practice your interviewing skills:
 - 1. Practice Interviewers:** Career Advancement employs interview specialists to offer mock interviews that are exactly like the real thing. To schedule a practice interview, call 773-702-7040.
 - 2. Super Interview Walk In Days:** Career Advancement holds Super Interview Walk In Days throughout the year for students who are seeking full-time positions in any sector. Ask a Career Adviser for more information about this program.



Employment Interviews

Dress for Success

Part of preparing yourself for a job search involves making the transition from being a student to looking and behaving as a professional. In most cases, it is best to dress conservatively in a suit that makes you feel comfortable and confident. You want the employer to focus on you, not your appearance.

General Tips:

- Controlled hairstyles
- Neatly manicured hands
- Makeup, light and natural
- Suit- for most employers a skirt or a pantsuit is okay
- Press your dress shirt, wear a conservative tie
- Dress shoes or heels of a comfortable height and dark knee-high socks

The Interview

The employer's goal in the interview is to discover the answers to these questions: "Why should I hire you?" and "Why would you be good for my company or organization?" Any other question the interviewer asks you is directly related to those two basic issues. Everything about you--your answers to questions, the questions you ask, your manner and dress--should address these concerns.

General Advice

- Don't ever be late. Plan to arrive at least fifteen minutes early. You'll need this time to find your way to the interview location, visit the restroom, and mentally prepare for the interview.
- Give a firm handshake and make eye contact.
- Be professional and polite at all times. Focus on the positive and never speak badly of former bosses, co-workers, etc.
- Show your interest in the interviewer, the job, and the employer; enthusiasm is important.
- Be candid and relaxed. Remember to maintain eye contact.
- Answer the specific questions asked, fully and with an example, and then stop talking. Don't be afraid of silence. Careful listening is as important as articulate answering.
- Express yourself clearly and concisely. Make your point and don't ramble. Practice helps you to develop these skills.

Questions may be oriented toward behavior, case studies, and/or reaction to stress. They help the interviewer evaluate how you have reacted in comparable situations, how you solve problems, and how you deal with pressure. Here are some typical questions.

Common Questions

- Tell me about yourself and why you are interested in this job/company?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to this company/organization?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- In what ways do you think you have grown most in the past two to three years?
- Describe a time you failed.
- Tell me how you deal with pressure.
- What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What are your long-range goals?
- What motivates you?

Behavioral Questions

- Describe a time when you made a difficult decision.
- Tell me about a time when you resolved a crisis.
- Have you ever changed someone's mind? How?
- How would you prepare for a confrontation?
- Have you ever given feedback? How did you do it?
- Describe a time when you defended your position.
- Tell me about your usual roles in team activities.
- Tell me about a time you had to be assertive.
- Have you ever communicated bad news? How?



Employment Interviews

Your Questions

The questions you ask can be as important as the ones you answer. Not only can they help you obtain information you need; they demonstrate your sincere interest in the job. Don't miss this opportunity to use questions to present your abilities. Avoid asking questions that could be answered on their website, by annual reports or other easily available materials; you will appear unprepared.

Question for an HR manager:

- What is the departmental structure?
- What type of orientation or training do new employees receive?

Questions for a prospective supervisor:

- What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? In the first year?
- What are the company's/organization's plans for future growth?
- What are the characteristics of a successful person at your company/organization?

Questions for co-workers:

- What are the most challenging facets of the job?
- How would you describe your company's/organization's culture?
- Why you enjoy working for your company/organization?

Following Up on Your Interview

Evaluate the interview. Write down the questions you found most difficult to answer. How could you have improved the interview? Are you satisfied with your answers to difficult questions, or can you think of better ways to respond to them? Do you need to do more research? Use this interview to improve your next one.

Be sure to send the interviewer(s) a short thank-you email. In addition to showing that you appreciate the interviewer's time, this is a chance to reiterate your interest in and qualifications for the job. Be sure to send letters to everyone who interviewed you during a site visit or on-campus interview. Thank you letters should be sent within **twenty-four** hours of the interview or meeting. Even if you are no longer interested in the position you discussed, you should still send a thank-you letter.

Sample Thank-You Letter

This is a guide. You should develop your own thank you letter using your own words.

Alison Job
5554 S. Kimbark, Apt. 8
Chicago, IL 60637
March 19, 2010

Ms. Dorothy West
Internship Coordinator
Chicago Magazine
500 North Dearborn, Suite 1200
Chicago, IL 60610-4901

Dear Ms. West:

I am writing to thank you for meeting with me yesterday regarding the Editorial Internship position. I was especially interested to hear how committed your team is to training and professional development for employees. After reviewing our discussion, I am sure with the combination of my literary and interpersonal skills I would be able to contribute to your office in significant and meaningful ways.

Again, I appreciate your time and interest and look forward to another opportunity to further discuss the possibility of joining your organization.

Cordially,
Alison Job