

Before the Interview

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What to bring and wear

- Know the details of the interview: date, time, location, names, and titles of the interviewers
- Update your résumé and bring several copies with you
- A padfolio or notepad, pens, and a portfolio (if you have one)
- Plan a professional outfit:
 - Remember it is better to be over-dressed than under-dressed! You don't need to spend a lot of money on an outfit, perhaps you have items in your wardrobe that are already appropriate. If not, check department stores for discounts or look at thrift stores.

Here are some guidelines to follow regarding appearance:

Yes	No
• Professional-looking pantsuit • Suit or jacket • Shirt and tie • Knee-length tailored skirt • Tights or nylons • Comfortable dress shoes • Clean shaven and well groomed *Make sure your clothes fit you well and are clean and ironed	• Jeans • Tank tops and midriff shirts • Sweats • Short skirts • Big earrings • Excessive makeup • Flip-flops or tennis shoes • Avoid perfume/cologne/smoke

Know yourself

Before going into an interview, it is important to know how your experience and skills relate to the position you are applying for. While you will not likely be asked these specific questions, knowledge about yourself and how you fit with the position will help showcase your enthusiasm and integrate your skills into interview responses.

- Who are you? What are your interests, passions, talents, and skills/competencies?
- What is your educational background?
- What do you know how to do?

It's important to remember that you are more than your major. Employers are looking for critical thinking, complex problem solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge in real-world settings, among other competencies. These are all things that your education has prepared you for - you just need to know how to speak about it in an interview!

Know the employer

The biggest mistake interviewees make is lack of knowledge about the company. Prevent this by doing your research on the employer before the interview:

- Gather information on the employer from:
 - People you know who work in the industry - use any connections you have through family, friends, professors, classmates

Know the employer, cont...

- Gather information on the employer from:
 - Thoroughly reviewing information on their website
 - External websites such as Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and the Business Journal for the area the organization is headquartered - Glassdoor.com often lists interview questions asked to past applicants
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer(s)
 - Use the information you find from your research to create well thought out questions
 - Prepare a salary requirement based on your research in case they ask
 - Possible general questions that are appropriate to ask include:
 - What is a typical day like for this position?
 - Who is your ideal candidate?

Know your fit

After you have thought about your background, and done your research on the organization, your fit for this position will start to emerge. The interview is an opportunity for you to figure out if you are a fit for that organization as well. It is critical to be able to convey your fit to the employer throughout the interview.

Review the job description and think of an example from your academic or extracurricular experience that demonstrates that skill or quality.

Their requirements	Your experience
Team player	Elected to position of secretary in Business Club, worked with other officers to plan schedule...
Ability to problem solve	Interned at publishing house, created method of organizing book proposals by date to ensure we didn't miss new talent
Communication skills (verbal and written)	VP of recruitment at a sorority, developed plan for a rush involving new members, presented ideas to group
Organizational skills and attention to detail	For final project, conducted a literature review of (X), with faculty help reviewed over 140 journal articles

Practice answering interview questions

It's impossible to know exactly what an employer will ask you in an interview, but the job description is your best guide to determine what skills the employer is seeking. Practice describing examples of how you have deployed these skills.

Do a practice interview with a career counselor or a friend, or participate in Practice Interview Days with an employer (hosted on campus every semester).

Sample interview questions

Tell me about yourself

- Think about what brought you to this interview - why did you apply for the position and why are you qualified? Keep your answer relevant to the position (educational background and college experiences, such as internships and student group involvement)
- Only bring up pre-college experiences if they are relevant to why you are applying
- Be concise - make sure your response is no more than 2 minutes long

Sample interview questions, cont...

Strengths and weaknesses

- Strength: Think of three strengths that are relevant to the position, and most importantly, include examples of when you have utilized those strengths in the past.
- For example:
"My top strength is my written communication, as evidenced by the concise memo I provided to an internship supervisor summarizing a recent book proposal. My other strengths are..."
- Weakness: When asked to give a weakness, the best way to respond to this question is to focus on what you are currently working on improving. Pick a skill that you can easily improve versus a personality trait, and talk about what you are doing to improve.
- For example:
*"While I am confident in my ability to present to a group, I'm not as skilled in different presentation tools. I am currently challenging myself to not use PowerPoint for my next three presentations, and instead to use new tools such as Prezi, or relying on different visual aids."**

**Make sure the skill you choose is not one that is required for the position!*

Behavioral-based interview questions

Employers want to understand your past performance and see how you might respond to situations in the future. Behavioral interview questions usually start with 'tell me about a time', or 'give me an example'.

Consult the job description to see what kind of skills they are seeking and then think of 5-10 examples of times when you demonstrate those skills from a variety of situations.

Your answer should follow the STAR format:

The STAR Technique - Behavior Interview Questions	
S (Situation)	Briefly set up the situation by describing the context of your example (who, what, when, where, how)
T (Task)	Explain the task YOU had to complete as an individual, or the problem you had to solve
A (Action)	Describe the actions you took to complete the tasks or solve the problem
R (Response)	Close by explaining the result of your efforts. Quantify the outcome if possible

For some of us it can be hard to take credit for something individually, but employers will be expecting to hear what YOU contributed.

Example thank you note:

Dear Maria Blaise,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Volunteer coordinator position at The Science Museum of Minnesota. I really enjoyed learning more about the Science Museum and how vital the volunteers are to the success of the organization. After the interview I am even more excited about the possibility of working for your organization as I believe my Communication Studies degree, experience volunteering at several nonprofits, and my attention to detail would make me a great fit for the position. Thank you for considering me and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Thanks,
Isabella Perez

Considering a job offer

- You don't need to accept a job offer on the spot. Thank them and ask when they need your decision, and be sure to follow up with any questions you have about the offer before accepting.
- When reviewing an offer look at it holistically: fit of organization, fit of position, salary, and benefits (health insurance, 401(k), life insurance, vacation days, etc.)
 - Determine cost of living and salary ranges based on location, industry, and position: salary.com, payscale.com, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Association of Colleges and Employers Salary Survey
- Contact other employers you have interviewed with and let them know you have received an offer and inquire about their hiring timeline
- Once you accept a position contact any organizations you have interviewed with to withdraw from their process

Negotiating a job offer

If there is a part of your offer that you are unhappy about, ask the employer if the offer is negotiable. If they say yes, then prepare for how you are going to negotiate.

Salary is the most commonly negotiated, but other parts of the offer may be negotiable too, such as start date or vacation days.

Use these tips for salary negotiation:

- Ask don't assume: remain professional, friendly, and open
- State your reasons for why you are asking for more
- Always give a salary range, not a firm number
 - Example: *I am so excited about this opportunity, thank you for your offer and your willingness to discuss my salary and benefits. I did some research on the average salary for this role in the Twin Cities and was wondering if you would consider a salary in the range of \$38,000 - \$41,000? I am very open to discussing this*

People from underrepresented populations and women are less likely to negotiate their salary. Although it can be intimidating to ask, employers are prepared for these conversations and often expect it! Keep in mind that by not negotiating your starting salary it could impact your earning potential over your lifetime.

Declining a job offer

- Let the organization know in a timely manner - they are waiting on an answer from you before they can move forward
- Be polite and sincere when you decline the offer
 - Thank them for considering you and let them know your reason for not accepting

Example Behavioral Interview Response

Question: Describe a project for which you faced multiple deadlines, and how you handled it.

Answer: **Situation:** *Last fall I took the initiative to apply for grants to fund a professional speaker for a event. It's often difficult to get grants for event funding, and it's important to meet various grant deadlines.*

Task: *I researched grant options and found several possibilities. Each had a different deadline and different window of time for which the money could be used.*

Action: *The varying timelines required me to create a small database, which I organized by grant deadlines, purposes, and the windows of time they could be used. I used this database to help me apply for the appropriate grants at the appropriate times.*

Result: *The primary grant came through, but a smaller grant did not. So I quickly helped find a last-minute event sponsor, then helped to update the PR materials and budget accordingly. In the end, the event was successful on multiple levels. We expected about 50 students to attend 60 showed up. Also, we were able to provide honorariums to additional speakers. This example highlights my ability to organize, problem solve, and make decisions.*

During the Interview

- Arrive 10 minutes prior to interview start time
- Act as if the interview has started as soon as you arrive, be polite to everyone you interact with
- Follow the interviewer's lead. For example:
 - Some interviews are conversational in tone while others are more structured, follow the interviewer's lead and match their style
 - Typically in American business culture making eye contact and shaking hands is expected, but perhaps this isn't the norm at the organization or it might not be culturally appropriate for the individual. Be adaptable to the situation. Also, if shaking hands and making eye contact isn't culturally appropriate for you to do, you may want to let the interviewer know in advance or plan for how you will approach this at the interview.
- Be yourself and show confidence: the interviewer wants to understand who you are and why you are a good fit for the position and the organization
- Demonstrate how your past experiences and skills make you a good fit and provide examples
- If you are confused by what the interviewer is asking, it is okay to ask for clarification
- If you are asked something and don't have an answer, take time to collect your thoughts
- Sometimes you will be in front of a panel of interviewers: Address the whole panel during your interview as opposed to focusing only on the person who asked you the last question
- As the interview is wrapping up to be sure to summarize your qualifications and interest again, as well as thank them for their time
- Ask about the hiring timeline and next steps and ask for their business cards so that you can follow up with a thank you note

After the Interview

- Assess the interview and your interest in the position and organization
- Send thank you notes to everyone who interviewed you; include what you enjoyed most about your conversation and re-state your interest and qualifications. It is professional to send either email or handwritten notes.
- If you haven't heard back from the employer in the timeline they indicated, send a follow-up email to check in on where they are in their hiring process and indicate your interest