

Interviewing Guide



Introduction • Interview Preparation Interview Structure • Types of Interviews •
Sample Interview Questions • Interview Do's and Don'ts • Illegal Questions

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Heinz College Career Services

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Introduction

Job interviews are often perceived as an unpleasant rite of passage. However, with ample preparation, it is possible to enter the interview process with confidence and to enjoy the experience. A common misconception of those new to the process is that the interviewer holds all the power. Instead, the interview is a way for both parties to assess the fit between you and your skills and interests, and the company and its values and culture.

This information guide will help break down the parts of an interview, types of interviews, interview do's and don'ts, basic interview questions, and also offer a few suggestions for questions you may want to ask an employer. Remember that practice makes perfect. You can create and practice your responses to common interview questions and register for mock interviews through Career Services.

Interview Preparation

Before you begin the interview process, it is important to:

- **Establish your priorities:** Think about what you are looking for in a company and position. Do you want to travel? Do you like working autonomously or on a team? Are you willing to relocate?
- **Think about your transferable skills:** ALL companies desire: Communication, teamwork, interpersonal, motivation/initiative, strong work ethic, analytical, flexibility, organizational, and leadership skills. Think about how you have developed these skills during your classroom experiences, activities, internships, etc.
- **Research the organization:** Learn all you can about the company, including the services, products, or programs of the organization, responsibilities of the position for which you are interviewing, the language of the industry/organization, current events, and trends. *Resources for obtaining information:* alumni (or others) who already work there, trade magazines, websites such as Glassdoor.com and company websites, Vault profiles and surveys. Learn your interviewer's name and Google them. Look for any professional papers, etc.
- **Ask what type of interview to expect:** Common types of interviews are behavioral, case or panel.
- **Study and memorize your resume:** The interviewer will most likely be using your resume to learn about you and to conduct the interview. Make sure you know what is on your resume and be ready to provide details. Think about ways you can use your experience to your advantage.
- **Know your strengths:** Consider how your *interests, skills, and knowledge* match the organization's needs, and think about how you can express that during an interview.
- **Prepare answers:** Before the interview, prepare your answers for commonly asked questions and questions that you might find particularly difficult.
- **Prepare questions:** Before the interview, prepare questions to ask the interviewer. This is your chance to show your interest and to get information that you couldn't find during your research. Remember, the purpose of an interview is also to decide if this company/organization is a good fit for *you*.

- **Practice:** Arrange a mock interview with a career advisor, practice aloud with a friend or in front of a mirror or video camera, or use InterviewStream online mock interview found on Tartan Trak's homepage.

Once The Interview Is Scheduled

The night before your interview, you should:

- Prepare a folder with copies of your resume, references, and transcript
- Set aside the outfit you'll be wearing the next day and make sure it's ironed
- Make sure you get enough sleep
- Set your alarm and plan your route so that you arrive at least 10 minutes early

The Day of the Interview

Remember to be friendly and polite to everyone you meet and think positively. You should also dress for success:

- Be sure clothes are cleaned and pressed, shoes shined and in good shape
- Go easy on make-up, cologne, aftershave, hairstyles, and jewelry
- Make sure your hair does not cover your eyes
- Cover any tattoos and avoid gaudy jewelry

Women:

- Wear a classic suit or a simple dress with a jacket. Navy, Black, or Dark Gray are best.
- Dress in higher style than the position calls for but do not overdress
- Avoid wearing clothes that are tight, revealing, or too trendy

Men:

- Wear a tie even if you will never wear one once you get the job
- Wear a suit or sport jacket with trousers that match. Dark colors such as Navy or Dark Gray are best.
- The color of your shoes should match the color of your socks
- Get a trim of head and facial hair and make sure your fingernails are trimmed and clean

The Interview Structure

Most interviews—whether on campus, at a job fair, or at the employer's site—will have the same structure.

Opening

Don't underestimate the importance of the introduction- the interviewer will be evaluating you as soon as you walk through the door. Be engaging and professional.

1. Shake hands, use eye contact, and smile!
2. Call the interviewer by Mr. or Ms.-- do not use the first name

3. Follow the interviewer's cue- you will probably start by getting acquainted and establishing rapport with small talk. The interviewer is forming his/her first impression of you. Don't forget good posture which shows self-confidence.
4. This will be about 3-5 minutes and then the interviewer will transition to the harder questions.

Interviewer Questions

The interviewer will ask a variety of questions with topics ranging from your education, work and internship experiences, activities, career plans, and self-assessment. The interviewer will use open ended questions that will let you describe your background. Your goal is to communicate clearly how your experiences lend themselves to this position. This is your chance to sell yourself!

These questions will allow the interviewer to:

1. Gather information about your background, experiences, goals, aspirations
2. Learn about your personality, attitude, individual characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses
3. Predict how you will perform on the job

When responding to Questions:

1. Remember to focus
2. Be honest
3. Listen, think, then talk
4. Be brief, but thorough
5. Don't ramble
6. Provide examples
7. Mention results/outcome
8. Use complete sentences
9. Try to find common ground
10. Use eye-contact
11. Watch your "ums," "ands," "likes," and "you knows."

Your Questions

The next phase of the interview is your questions. This will give you an opportunity to show you did your homework and to clarify any information that has already been provided. When developing your questions, make sure they are well thought out. Do not ask questions that could be answered from the company website or literature. Remember that you are interviewing them as well as they are interviewing you. This part of the interview should last about 5 -10 minutes.

Examples of general questions you can ask during an interview:

- How long do people typically stay in the position?
- Where do people go after they leave the position?
- What characteristics are you looking for?
- What growth/reduction areas do you anticipate in the future for this organization?
- What major challenges is this organization facing?
- What are the challenges, negative aspects or positive aspects of this position?
- What advanced training programs are available for those who demonstrate outstanding ability?
- What are the organization's growth plans?
- That is the next step in the selection process?
- Where do you see me in five years if I join and succeed with your organization?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- How are employees rewarded for excellent performance?
- What commitment does the organization have to the career development and training of its employees?

- What is the attrition rate of new hires within one/three/five years?
- How does this position and department fit into the organization as a whole?
- How would you describe the work atmosphere in the organization?
- What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? In the first year?
- What do employees seem to like best and least about the company?
- What are the chances of being relocated after starting the job?

The Close

The fourth stage of the interview is the close. The interviewer should inform you of the next step in the process. If he/she does not, you may ask in a professional manner. Express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview and “ask for the position” by indicating your interest and making a final statement regarding your qualifications.

The Follow-up

After the interview, SEND A THANK YOU LETTER within 48 hours to everyone you met. It will set you apart from many of the other applicants. The Career Center has information regarding thank you letters. Take notes about the interview, which should assist you if you have a second interview. If you have not heard back from the interviewer in the time span they had mentioned, then you can call or email them and ask for the status of your candidacy, or ask if they have made any hiring decisions at this point in time.

Second Interview

Your second, and maybe third interview, will usually be held at the employer’s site. While the actual interview structure will be similar, the questions will be more in-depth and you will meet with a variety of people. The following information is taken from the *Career Guide* from Carnegie Mellon University.

Making Arrangements

It is proper to acknowledge the invitation for a site visit in writing. Clarify all travel details with the employer, including date(s) of visit, lodging, contact person, travel/flight information, time of arrival, local transportation, and itinerary. It is common practice for most employers to assume all reasonable travel expenses incurred by a candidate who is invited to visit the employer’s office. If this is not stated, seek clarification. Be conservative in making arrangements, as some employers will judge your maturity and integrity by the manner in which you manage and report your expenses. Do not forget to save your receipts.

The Players

The person who originally interviewed you will probably serve as your host, or will at least greet you and orient you to the process. You will then interview with the hiring manager (who will be your prospective supervisor), and his/her supervisor. You may also meet and interview with those who work in related functions, and/or other newly hired staff members.

The Interview

This interview will be more in-depth because it will determine whether or not you get the job. The questions will require longer, more detailed answers, so you will need to know more specific information about the organization and have intelligent questions to ask. It may lead to further tests or background checks.

Testing

Employers are using a variety of tests or checks, such as personality tests, criminal background and credit checks or drug tests. The US Chamber of Commerce estimates that approximately half of the Fortune 500 companies currently engage in drug testing either in the selection process or as part of random testing

programs. If asked to take a drug test, say yes. You may also be asked to take a skills or writing test to measure your level of knowledge on certain topics or skills.

Types of Interviews

Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interviews are the most common types of interviews, involving questions about specific scenarios you've encountered, rather than hypothetical scenarios. For example, the interviewer may say:

1. "Tell me about a time when..."
2. "Give me an example of time when..."

To answer these types of questions, remember the "STAR" method to walk the interviewer through the situation:

- S – Situation: Setting the scene
- T – Task: What needs to be done
- A – Action: The steps you took
- R – Result: The end product

By thinking about situations you can use during interviews and understanding and implementing this method *during* the interviews, you can better express your qualifications and answer these types of questions. For example:

1. Situation
 - a. "I took a marketing class last semester..."
 - b. "My group was given a project with a very tight deadline..."
2. Task/Action
 - a. "I rescheduled some optional activities..."
 - b. "I did extensive research using Lexis-Nexis..."
 - c. "I solicited input from my group members..."
3. Result
 - a. "I received an A for my portion..."
 - b. "I learned that I should always devise a working outline first..."

Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work or school that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your spoken communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
- Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
- Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you've completed.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

- Describe a time when you felt it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to the needs of another person.
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job or in the classroom, and tell me how you solved it.
- Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer, coworker or peer.
- Describe your most recent group effort.
- Describe your dream job/career.
- Describe the most creative project you have completed.
- Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your coworkers or peers.
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick incoming to a decision.
- Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information

Case Interviews

Case interviews are typically used for management consulting firms or firms seeking to scrutinize your problem-solving ability, creativity, analytical skills, and ability to work under pressure. The interviewer will typically present a business scenario and you will be expected to ask questions and develop a solution using a framework to present your ideas.

A 5-Step Approach to Case Interview Questions

1. Develop a specific frame or structure for the question. Use “Big Picture Thinking.” Work from the *General* to the *Specific*, using what information you are given, what you already know and what additional information the interviewer might give you is asked.
2. Prioritize and identify the basic issues contained in the problem and use problem-solving logic.
3. Narrow down your potential answers to the most logical.
4. Analyze the problem from all perspectives, working from the Big Picture information that suggests possible alternative methods you can use to derive the best possible answer (guess).
5. Draw conclusions from your analysis, demonstrating results based on information and logical conclusions.

Tips:

- Don’t be thrown by the interviewer’s questions. Realize that there are numerous good answers. The interviewer is using the case approach to gain an understanding of your thought processes.
- Be concise. If asked for the “top two” issues, confine your response to two items only. Avoid going into too much detail. The more explicit your thinking, the better.
- Provide logical back-up for your answers. Be sure to explain what case facts led you to a conclusion and how you reasoned from those facts to your conclusion.
- Don’t be afraid to ask clarifying questions. If you don’t understand the case facts, you will find it difficult to ace the interview.

- Remember, common sense goes a long way. Also, try and relax in the process.

Resources for Case Interview Research and Practice:

<http://careers.mckinsey.com/>

Scroll down and click on “Online Case Study” - this tool takes you through a case step-by-step

www.acethecase.com

Offers a variety of sample questions and helpful links

[Vault Guide to the Case Interview](#)

Can be found in the Career Services Resource Room (A002)

http://www.vault.com/cb/careerlib/careerlib_main.jsp?parrefer=2060

This link allows you 24hr access to interviewing information as well as practice guides and tips

http://www.quintcareers.com/case_interviews.html

An article from QuintCareers.com entitled, “Mastering the Case Review”

Sample Interview Questions

General:

- Tell me about yourself. Describe your personality.
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- If I were to contact your previous boss/co-workers, what would s/he say about you?

Qualifications for this Position:

- Why are you interested/qualified for this position?
- Give me an example of a partnership or collaboration that you helped form. What was your role?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to prepare and present a presentation. Who was the audience? Was it well received? (Hint: Think about the STAR Method)
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?

Background:

- What are your greatest strengths and biggest weaknesses?
- What is your most important/proudest accomplishment?
- In what areas would you like to develop further? Have you thought about how you will do this?
- What distinguishes you from other people who can do the same tasks as you?

Initiative:

- Give me an example of a project you were responsible for starting. What did you do? How did it work out? (Hint: Think about the STAR Method)

Stress:

- In your last job, when did you feel pressured? What was most likely to create stress for you? Why?
- Give an example of a time when you had to work under pressure. What were the results? (Hint: Think about the STAR Method)

Motivation:

- In all of your jobs, which gave you the most meaningful experiences? Why?
- What do you need from an organization to feel motivated?

Creativity and Innovation:

- Which have you preferred to work with – planned day, or a day you created for yourself? Why?
- If you could change one thing which is inefficient at your current job, what would it be?
- What is the most creative thing you have done in a past job? How did it occur?

Problem Solving/ Analytical Skills:

- Give me an example of a difficult decision you had to make at your last job. How did you solve it? Follow up. Why did you choose that method rather than another solution?

Flexibility:

- How much stability would you like in terms of a fixed job description? How much have you had at other organizations?

Organization, Attention to Detail and Time Usage:

- In your last job, describe a busy day. How do you organize a day like that?
- Have you ever supervised others? What is your typical supervisory style?
- Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? (Hint: Think about the STAR Method)
- Have you ever been in a situation when you had to anticipate a potential problem and develop preventative measures? What did it entail?

Interpersonal Communication Skills/Cooperation:

- Give me an example of the kind of person whom you find it difficult to communicate with. Why?
- What role do you usually take in a group?
- Tell me about a time when you were part of a team. How did that team perform?
- How do you handle conflict/criticism with peers?
- Give an example of a time when you were tolerant of an opinion different from yours.

Work Environment:

- What is a “pet peeve” you have had about an organization or an environment you’ve worked in?
- If you were a manager here, or in your past job, what would you require of your employees? Why?
- When past managers have given you projects to do, how much information and direction did they usually give you? Give me an example of what seemed to be the right amount for you.
- What kind of performance feedback do you want and how often?
- What problems are appropriate to bring to your manager?
- What do you require from a boss?

Career Ambitions:

- What are you looking for in a job that you haven't had before? What would make you want to stay in a job?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years and how will this position help you get there?

Conclusion:

- Is there any additional information you wish to share that may be helpful to me in considering your qualifications and interests?
- Do you have any questions?

Candidate Questions:

Prepare questions ahead of time to ask the interviewer. Asking questions can help you to assess whether the position is a good match for you. Common questions are:

1. What skills and attributes are most valued at this company/ organization?
2. What are some of the biggest drawbacks of this position?
3. What kinds of opportunities would I have for growth and professional development?
4. What would you say is the most rewarding feature about this job?

Closing:

The interviewer will give you cues toward the end of the interview. At this time, emphasize your interest, restate your qualifications, and find out what the next steps are. Be sure to thank the interviewer.

Interview Do's

- Arrive 5-10 minutes early.
- If you are traveling off campus, leave with time to spare. You never know when you might encounter a traffic problem or bad directions.
- If traveling off campus and you have a cell phone, take it. You can call the interviewer if you run into an unforeseen problem. If you do not have a phone, try to call from a pay phone if possible.
- If traveling off campus, take money! You may need change for a toll road, parking meter or garage.
- Smile and make eye contact during the interview.
- Good posture.
- Dress professionally.
- Use the interviewer's name. Start off with Mr. Jones or Ms. Smith; do not use their first name until you are asked.
- Be a good listener! Fully listen to the question before you formulate your response. Poor listening skills are not sought after.
- When you speak be clear, talk slowly and confidently.
- Remain positive about your educational and work experience, even if it was not. You can always find something positive or have learned something valuable from every experience you have had.
- Answer questions with examples of specific circumstances, action and results achieved. Prove that you are able to do the job.
- Use correct grammar!

Interview Don'ts

(From Vault Guide to Resumes, Cover Letters & Interviewing)

- *Don't* blame poor performance on past employers, workplaces, bosses, or co-workers. Even if you worked for Satan in Hell, make an attempt to say something pleasant or neutral, such as, "I met many interesting sinners," or "It was a really hot industry."
- *Don't* discuss personal or academic pursuits, unless you're still clearly in the small talk portion of the interview, someone asks you about these directly, or you can relate them to the position for which you are interviewing. Hobbies like mountain climbing show persistence.
- *Don't* appear too eager to discuss matters of compensation, hours, or vacation time. These are legitimate questions, but they should take a back seat to discovering whether or not you and the job are a good fit.
- *Don't* show bad posture: don't slouch, tap your feet, or splay your legs or arms.
- *Don't* let nervousness alter your actions: don't fumble with objects in your hand, rearrange your hair, jiggle pocket change, or chew gum.
- *Don't* let your message get muffled: don't slur, don't drop your eyes, or speak too quickly.
- *Don't* fail to have questions when the time comes.
- *Don't* run on too long with answers to questions. Be aware of how the interviewer is responding to what you're saying. If you catch him or her looking bored or staring at you with a glazed or unfocused look, it's probably time to stop talking. If they want to find out more about what you were talking about, they'll ask you to continue.
- *Don't* fail to answer the question you're asked.
- *Don't* forget to smile! Remember, you're there at their invitation.

Illegal Questions

Under federal laws, certain personal questions relating to sex, age, race, national origin, religion, marital status, are illegal for interviewers to ask. The purpose of the law is to protect certain classes of people from discrimination. Sample illegal questions include:

Inquiry Area	Illegal	Legal
Age	How old are you?	Are you over the age of 18? (Any inquiry limited to establishing that applicant meets any minimum age required by law)
	What is your birth date?	

Affiliations	What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?	A request to list any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?
Arrest Record	Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of (the crime named should be related to performance of the job)?
Birthplace/National Origin/Citizenship	Are you a U.S. citizen?	Are you legally authorized to work in the U.S. without sponsorship?
	Where were your parents born?	What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (This questions is ok only if this ability is relevant for the job)
	What is your native tongue?	
Disabilities	Do you have any disabilities?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job? (This question is ok only if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)
	Please complete the following medical history	After a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam.
	How is your family's health?	
Marital/Family Status	What's your marital status?	Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?
	Do you plan to have a family? When?	Would you be willing to travel as needed by the job? (only ok if asked of all applicants for the job)
	How many children do you have?	Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (only ok if asked of all applicants for the job)
Military	If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?
Personal	Questions about height and weight, unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.	Are you able to lift a 50-lb weight and carry it 100 yards, as part of the job?

If you are asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- You can answer the question; however, you are then giving information that isn't related to the job and could harm your chances of getting the job
- You can refuse to answer the question; however, you are running the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational
- You can respond with an answer based on the intent of the question. This is your best bet, as you can structure your answer to how it relates to the job. For example, if you are asked, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" you can respond with, "I believe your concern is whether or not I am authorized to work in the U.S. I am in fact authorized to work in the United States."

Portions of the above table are taken from the 1999 Job Choices: Planning, National Association of Colleges and Employers.