

# INTERVIEWING

The interview is your chance to show the value you will bring to the organization and land the job. Interviewing is a significant part of the job search process and success in the interview results from practice and preparation.

## Tips for Interview Success

### *Before*

1. **Research:** Find out everything you can about the organization. Know the organization's products/services, vision/mission, history and current status. It's also helpful to familiarize yourself with industry-wide news and trends that might impact the organization. You can get this information online and from informational interviews with people who work for the organization or in a similar industry. You can also try to research the person who will be interviewing you through LinkedIn.
2. **Know the position:** Know the key competencies required for the position so you can highlight your particular strengths as they relate to the position.
3. **Logistics:** Bring a professional portfolio to the interview that includes extra copies of your resume and reference list as well as samples of writing or class projects. It is also wise to do a trial run of traveling to your interview location to determine how long it takes to get there and where to park.
4. **Practice:** Practicing is a vital component of preparing for the interview. Brainstorm possible interview questions based on the position description. Have a friend or roommate ask you some of the questions so you can practice your answers. You can also participate in a mock interview with a career advisor. A list of common interview questions is provided in this guide.
5. **Questions to ask employer:** Prepare 3-5 questions to ask the employer. Asking questions serves 2 purposes: 1) It shows your interest in the position and company, and 2) Answers provide you with the necessary information to decide whether or not the position is right for you. A suggested list of questions to ask the employer is provided in this guide.

### *During*

1. **Be Professional:**
  - Arrive 10-15 minutes early
  - Dress appropriately based on the company culture. Your attire should be one professional level higher than how most people dress at the company every day. (i.e., wear slacks and a dress shirt if most people wear jeans daily)
  - Avoid things that may be distracting to the interviewer such as strong cologne or perfume or flashy jewelry
  - Greet each person you meet with a firm handshake — practice your handshake beforehand. If seated when introduced to someone, stand up.
  - Be friendly and courteous to everyone you meet at the organization. You never know who is part of the hiring decision process.
2. **Tone:** It is important to convey your excitement and interest in the position as well as confidence in your abilities. Maintain a positive attitude in your answers. Smiling can go a long way in the interview because it projects a positive image that you are friendly and enjoyable to work with.

3. **Verbal Communication:** Be concise and keep your answers to about 2-minutes long. Try to avoid overusing filler words such as “um,” “like,” or “so.” If you don’t understand a question, ask for clarification.
4. **Non-Verbal Communication:** Maintain good eye contact with your interviewer(s). Try to avoid nervous movements such as shaking your legs or fiddling with your pen. Have good posture and lean in somewhat so you appear engaged and interested. Keep both feet on the ground.
5. **Closure:** Close the interview by reiterating why you believe you are the best fit for the position. Make sure to find out what the next steps are in the process. Leave the interview by giving a firm handshake again and thanking the interviewer for their time.

### *After*

1. **Thank you:** Send a thank you email or handwritten note as soon as possible after the interview. A handwritten note is preferred and more memorable. If you are concerned about the length of time to mail a card, send an email thank you right away and mail a card as well. If you met with multiple interviewers, send a thank you to each person.
2. **Follow up:** If you haven’t heard back from the company in the timeframe they indicated to you, be sure to follow up. Reiterate your interest in the position and inquire if any hiring decisions have been made.
3. **An Offer:**
  - It’s okay to take some time deciding; most employers want you to think about the offer before making a decision. Confirm with the employer when they need a final decision.
  - This is the time when salary and benefits should be discussed.
  - Many times you will need to accept an offer in writing or sign a contract. The job is not yours until you have a written agreement.
4. **A Decline:** If you do not get a job offer, remain gracious and positive. You never know what connections the employer may have elsewhere in the industry or what future positions may come open. Try not to take it personally. Not being hired is not a sign of failure or rejection. It only means you haven’t found the right fit for YOU (yet).

***Please see following pages for information on Interview Formats and Types of Questions.***

## Interview Formats

### *Phone Interviews*

A phone interview allows an employer to screen a candidate in a low-cost, time-effective manner. It is a technique for narrowing the field of candidates for in-person interviews by confirming your qualifications and checking your expected salary to see if you are in their budget range. Phone interviews typically last about 30 minutes and are performed by a recruiter or human resources professional.

- Use a landline phone to ensure the best connection. If you don't have access to a landline, make sure you are in an area with good cell phone service.
- Turn off call waiting to avoid interruptions
- Find a quiet space with minimal distractions
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly. Smile so your answers come across positively.
- Ask for clarity on any questions of which you are unsure
- Dress up for the interview even though they won't see you in person to help you mentally feel like you are in an in-person interview

### *In-Person Interviews*

In-person interviews help the employer assess if the candidate is a good cultural fit for the organization and how well you will support the work of the team or organization. These interviews are usually conducted by key decision makers such as your potential supervisor or co-workers. You may have multiple rounds of in-person interviews and meet with people from various levels in the organization's hierarchy.

- Focus on non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, tone of voice and body language—reference the Tips for Success earlier in this guide
- In-person interviews are sometimes conducted in groups or with panels of interviewers. Be sure to obtain business cards from everyone in the interview so you can follow up with a thank you note.

### *Online Video Interviews*

Online video interviews are similar to in-person interviews but allow the interviewer to save time and travel costs. You may encounter this type of interview if you're applying somewhere long distance.

- Test-run the equipment or program through which your interview will be conducted ahead of time
- Arrive early to the interview so you can make any adjustments to appearance prior to the interviewer arriving to the online interview. Use the in-picture mode so you can see how you appear.
- Ensure your background environment is clean and there are no distractions in your area. Make a good impression with your appearance by following the Tips for Success guidelines earlier in this guide.

## Types of Interview Questions

By practicing interview questions, you'll become more familiar with your own qualifications and will be well prepared to demonstrate how you can benefit an employer.

### *Traditional Interview Questions*

- **"Tell me about yourself."**  
Make a short, organized statement of your education, professional achievements and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.
- **"Why are you interested in this position?" or "What about our company interests you?"**  
Few questions are more important than these, so it is important to answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company.
- **"What strengths would you bring to this position?"**  
If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, and then give examples that demonstrate these skills.
- **"What are your weaknesses?"**  
Be positive—turn a weakness into a strength. Be honest about what challenges you and describe how you're working to improve your weakness in a positive way. Focus on skills rather than characteristics and say how you are developing new competencies.
- **"Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?"**  
The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.
- **"What are your career goals?" or "What are your future plans?"**  
The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.
- **"What salary are you expecting?"**  
The interviewer typically asks this question to see if your expectations align with the company's budget plans. Make sure you've done salary research beforehand online so you know the average salary range for the position you are seeking.

### *Resume-based Questions*

The interviewer may ask you several questions based on what he/she sees on your resume. The purpose is to gain more information about experiences you have highlighted and confirm the depth of your abilities and knowledge. Be ready to provide more details and explanations for all aspects you have highlighted on your resume.

Examples:

- **"You mentioned on your resume that you have web design experience. Can you tell me where you've used this?"**
- **"Your resume shows that you speak Spanish. ¿Dónde aprendió a hablar español?"**

## Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral questions are the most common. These types of questions are based on the theory that past performance predicts future performance. They usually begin with “Tell me about a time...” or “Give me an example....”

Many firms have identified the skills and qualities of their successful employees. The questions asked are designed to find out if you have demonstrated these skills in the past. Examples of the desired qualities/skills are: initiative, leadership, problem solving, teamwork, etc.

- Know the job description and company. Many times behavioral questions will relate to skills needed for the job or values the company deems important
- Know your resume: what you have done, what your role was in the success of the company, what and how you contributed.
- Think of a few stories or scenarios beforehand that you could pull examples from when explaining your skills or previous accomplishments.
- Be prepared to tell the story using the STAR format (see below)
- Be able to relate specific examples of when you’ve demonstrated a skill, strength, or trait.

Examples:

### Tell me about a time when you...

- Worked effectively under pressure
- Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker
- Were unable to complete a project on time
- Were forced to make an unpopular decision
- Had to adapt to a difficult situation
- Were disappointed in your behavior
- Had to deal with an irate customer
- Delegated a project effectively
- Prioritized the elements of a complicated project
- Worked with people who were very different from you
- Were faced with an ethical dilemma
- Demonstrated effective leadership skills

### Remember to frame your response using the STAR method:

**S = Situation** (describe the situation; set the stage for the story)

**T = Task** (describe the task at hand or what you were trying to accomplish)

**A = Action** (what action you took in the situation)

**R = Result** (what was the outcome or what resulted from your action)

## Case or Situational Questions

Interviewers utilize case or situational questions to evaluate your problem solving and analytical skills. These types of questions often begin with “What would you do....” or “How would you.....” You need to think on your feet and show how you would approach a problem or a specific work situation. Case or situational questions may be short or you might be provided with a longer question and provided time to work on it.

- Don't worry about coming up with the “right” answer, but instead demonstrate your critical thinking abilities and be authentic to what you would do if the situation were real.
- Ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand the question
- Don't feel you need to answer the question immediately—take time to think through your answer
- Deliver your thoughts logically and coherently—utilize a framework or create structure to the problem
- Be creative, but also realistic.

Examples:

- What would you change about our website?
- How would you deal with a colleague at work with whom you seem to be unable to build a successful working relationship?
- What would you do if the priorities on a project you were working on changed suddenly?
- How would you deal with an irate customer?
- What would you include in a weekly report that conveys how well a particular department is doing?
- The company is considering breaking into a new market. You must suggest which emerging markets would be viable. What factors would you consider?

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## Questions for the Interviewer

At most interviews, you will be invited to ask questions of your interviewer. This is an important opportunity for you to learn more about the employer, and for the interviewer to further evaluate you as a job candidate. Through your questions show your knowledge, competencies, and enthusiasm.

Examples:

- Can you please tell me how your career has developed at this company?
- What kind of training is involved with this job?
- Can you describe what a typical day is like in this job?
- How does the position and the department contribute to the overall company mission and philosophy?
- What characteristics best describe individuals who are successful in this position?
- What other positions and/or departments will I collaborate with most?
- How will my performance be evaluated? How often?
- How would you describe the organization's culture or environment?
- Can I clarify or expound on anything that would help you feel confident in my ability to do the job?
- What are the next steps in this process?

Examples of questions to avoid:

- What does your company do?
- What is the salary for this position?
- Where do I stand as a candidate?
- Can you tell me about your retirement plan and benefits?
- How much vacation time would I receive in this job?

## Reflection Notes

### *Strengths/Skills:*

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*Example:*

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*Example:*

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*Example:*

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*Example:*

### *Relevant Experiences/Stories to Highlight:*

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### *Questions for the Interviewer:*

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### **Need more help?**

Career Advisors in the Albers Placement Center are trained, knowledgeable and available to help you with your interview preparation. Appointments can be made for mock interviews during which we will help you practice your answers and identify areas for improvement.  
Make an appointment today!

### **Albers Placement Center**

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