



Interview GUIDE



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GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

The interview is your greatest opportunity to sell the skills and qualities you have to offer an employer. In an interview, you should exhibit confidence and enthusiasm about the career opportunity. Through words and behavior, you should demonstrate a desire to learn and a strong work ethic. The interviewer feels the winning candidates will be capable of doing the job well with proper training and supervision. Below are some guidelines for a successful interview.

- » Research the position, employer, and industry ahead of time to gain an understanding of the opportunity and prepare insightful questions to ask the interviewer.
- » Understand the importance of first impressions through a professional image and extension of proper business etiquette.
- » Practice articulating how you have built upon your academic education through employment, involvement on campus, and community activities. Further, be able to discuss the value of these experiences, what you've learned from each of them, and what skills you gained through them.
- » Demonstrate enthusiasm, a positive attitude, and a strong interest in the position throughout the interview process and follow up with a thank you note.

First Impressions are Critical

- » Dress appropriately, be early, and plan your trip and parking arrangements in advance. Turn your cell phone off and don't bring it to the interview with you.
- » Spit out your gum!
- » Make all correspondence neat and error-free.
- » Talk with other candidates during down time - it makes you seem friendlier.
- » Make small talk. Look for a connection to the interviewer, such as a common interest, in order to establish rapport.
- » Treat the receptionists or administrative assistants with respect and kindness.
- » Remember, nonverbal communication shapes an employer's perception of you. Eliminate repetitive, nervous behaviors such as nail biting, wiggling, or playing with hair or jewelry. Lean slightly forward in your chair, smile, and maintain good eye contact throughout the interview, and try not to look too stiff.

In a recent study done by JobVite.com, TheUndercoverRecruiter.com, and Work4labs.com, the following results were obtained:

- » While the average length of an interview is 40 minutes, 33% of 2000 surveyed bosses indicated they know within the first 90 seconds if they will hire that candidate.

How can they make such a decision in less than 2 minutes? In the same survey, respondents noted the following nonverbal mistakes as some of the reasons why you may be eliminated during the interview:

- » 70% indicated that applicants were too fashionable or trendy
- » 67% indicated applicants' failure to make eye contact
- » 55% stated the way the candidate dressed, acted, or walked through the door influenced their decision
- » 47% stated clients had little or no knowledge of the company
- » 38% was a tie between poor quality of voice and overall lack of confidence

- » 33% indicated clients' bad posture
- » 26% stated the client's handshake was too weak
- » 21% stated clients crossing their arms over their chest during the interview as significant

The Art of Answering Questions Effectively

- » Take your time. Pause to think through and formulate your answers. Do not be afraid of momentary silence. Prepare in advance and do not attempt to wing it. Remember, hope is not a strategy!
- » Answer the questions directly and concisely. Back up your assertions with concrete, real-life examples. Use the STAR technique (detailed below.)
- » Review your resume beforehand to prepare yourself with experiences and stories to discuss during the interview.

ON CAMPUS INTERVIEWS

The Hire System on www.HireOSUgrads.com allows subscribers to sign up for on-campus-interviews. Check the calendar on the Hire System for deadlines, upcoming interviewing dates, career fairs and other events. Also, be sure to prepare for interviews by participating in Mock Interview Days, interviewing with a career consultant, and by using Interview Stream, an online mock interviewing system that you have a free subscription to.

For more information on On-Campus Interviews, see hireosugrads.com or call (405) 744-5253.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Behavioral Interviews

- » Behavioral questions typically ask you to describe how you handled a situation.
- » You will have the opportunity to tell brief stories about yourself. Think of some recent, specific situations that demonstrate favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving a work experience, a class project, leadership, teamwork, or initiative.
- » A good way to prepare for these is to get a blank sheet of paper, and write your most recent work, leadership, volunteer, and project experience at the top. Then begin bulleting every memorable experience you had in that role (good and bad). Do this with as many roles as you are comfortable with.
- » Use the **STAR** acronym to provide a framework for your answer: Briefly explain the **SITUATION** and/or **TASK**. Give a specific description of the **ACTIONS** you took. Remember that this is where you are able to highlight the skills you used and how you effectively handled the situation. Complete the story by telling the **RESULTS** of your actions. Make sure the outcome reflects positively on you, even if the story itself was not favorable.
- » The behavioral interviewer will probably take many notes during the interview so don't be alarmed.
- » Never talk about controversial topics such as: religion, sex, race, government, drinking, death, or sad things in general.

Example Behavioral Questions

- » Give me an example of your leadership style.
- » Have you ever been a member of a team in which one person wasn't pulling his or her weight? How did you deal with it?
- » Tell me about a time when you used your customer service skills to deal with a difficult customer problem?

Resume-Based Interviews

- » Resume-Based Interviews are typically an in-depth discussion of the items included in your resume.
- » Be prepared to discuss each element on your resume and explain what you learned from each experience, any skills you used or developed, and how you will use that experience in your future career.
- » Think through experiences and situations that aren't represented on your resume that you can use to expand on and highlight your soft skills, knowledge, and experience.
- » This interview style tends to be more casual, but remember to remain professional at all times.

Telephone Interviews

- » Telephone Interviews are often conducted in an initial effort to screen candidates or because of time and distance restraints.
- » Select a quiet space for the interview and remove any potential distractions. You may book space through career services at HireOSUgrads.com under the "Make Appointment" tab.
- » Turn off call waiting.
- » Prepare for a telephone interview the same way you would a face-to-face interview. Dress professionally, smile, and have all of your application and research materials in front of you. Because the interviewer cannot see you, speaking clearly and articulating are even more vital. Be sure to speak slowly so the interviewer will be able to understand everything you say.
- » Make sure that you do not interrupt the interviewer. Take time listening and answering the questions.
- » Ask insightful questions at the conclusion of the interview and note the next steps in the interview process so you can follow up appropriately.
- » Prepare your voice; do exercises to loosen up.
- » Write down the interviewer's name as soon as they share it and ask for the interviewer's email at the end so you can follow up.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

- » Assume that you will be asked this question, and prepare your response ahead of time. Research the employer and the position to identify how you can make a valuable contribution. Prepare up to a two-minute commercial-style response featuring your past experience (successes) and challenges (which you have overcome). Frame your answer as to how you can contribute to meeting the needs of the employer: "My background has been devoted to preparing myself to become the best professional possible. For example..." Talk about your experience, qualifications, and accomplishments rather than specifics of your childhood, family, or hobbies. You may include reasons why you developed a passion for your field as well as your long-range professional goals.

Why are you motivated to apply for this position? Why are you attracted to our company?

- » Talk about the interesting details of the job and why they fascinate you. Discuss the skills you have that the job requires. Know what distinguishes this employer from its competitors. Reflect on why this employer appeals to you versus other employers in the industry. Research the web site and the company's mission statement and core values; this information will allow you to make intelligent and insightful comments: "Through my internship experience, I discovered just how much I love this profession. That's when I started researching employers that had worthy goals and results. There is no other company that compares with yours. After reading your core values on the company web site, I knew that there was no other organization with which I'd rather be associated."

How do you believe you best fit in this organization?

- » This question is designed, in part, to see how much you know about the organization. Thanks to your prior research, you will know of services that are needed or areas where the employer is expanding. You can base your response on that information. However, unless you are interviewing for a specific job in a specific department, keep your response general by indicating several areas of interest: “If I understand correctly, you are expanding your marketing efforts to include the Texas area. I am particularly interested in that possibility. My excellent internship with a competitor gave me a familiarity with the Texas market, and it would be exciting to help you in that effort.”

Tell me about your education. How has your education prepared you for your career?

- » Explain your education, training, and skills. Mention a course in which you excelled or a project that was especially beneficial to your skill development. Explain how your education has contributed to successful life and leadership experiences. A lot of companies will ask what your favorite and least favorite classes have been.

How did you learn about our organization?

- » Let the interviewer know that your decision to interview with this employer was not just a random choice. Demonstrate a genuine interest in the organization. You are not applying just because you happened to see a poster on the bulletin board. Cite any contact you have had with employees, customers, or products that has given you a positive impression.

What are your strengths?

- » Don't list more than three strengths, as some recruiters may ask you to list the same number of weaknesses. Cite from one to three areas where colleagues have praised you in the past. Provide specific examples of what they have said and how you utilize these strengths to benefit others: “My co-workers have always sought me out to ask advice in sticky situations with difficult people. They say that I know how to work with all kinds of people, which means a lot to me. As a result, I would say that my biggest strengths are adaptability and strong interpersonal communication skills.”

What are your weaknesses?

- » Many people tend to answer with something that could be viewed as both a positive and negative trait, such as the fact that they have a tendency to work too much. Be careful, however, as this response tends to be overused and may send the wrong message. Instead, name a personal challenge with which you have actually dealt. You'll want to be careful to name a characteristic that isn't essential to the job. Remember that the key to answering this question successfully is that each weakness should be followed with actions you have taken to overcome the weakness.

Did you ever have a disagreement/conflict with a supervisor? Why? Why not?

- » Be wise in answering a question of this nature. You do not want to give the impression of being either a troublemaker or someone who avoids conflict at all cost. Neither is valuable to an organization. Conflict is a fact of life. In fact, employers value people with the skills necessary to get through difficult situations: “Yes, my boss had asked me to do something that did not appear totally ethical. I asked to speak with him after work when we could have a private conversation. I was able to share my personal dilemma about the situation. Thankfully, he had not realized all the implications and quickly made appropriate adjustments. We were both very happy about the outcome. I was able to be true to my values, and we developed an even more productive working relationship.”

Which course did you find most difficult and why?

- » The interviewer wants to know if you have perseverance when faced with a difficulty: “After earning a ‘D’ in my first semester, I was devastated. The benefit, however, was that it revealed my poor study skills. As a result, I joined a study group and hired a tutor. After taking the course again, I was able to bring the grade up to a ‘B.’ The valuable study skills I learned have dramatically improved my overall academic achievement.”

What is your greatest failure? What did you learn from it?

- » Everyone, at some point or another, fails. Being able to admit failure shows maturity. However, avoid examples that might reflect on your ability to do the job. You might want to use an example like the one given in the previous question. For example, you can show how you dealt with the failure, learned from the experience, and how it helped you succeed in the future.

Do you work best in a team environment or independently?

- » Think about your response to this question in light of the requirements of the position while being true to your nature: “Although I have thoroughly enjoyed group projects and teamwork, the hours required to work independently to solve complex problems is equally satisfying to me. Let me give you an example.”

Are you a team player?

- » Be honest about yourself and strive to highlight successful team experience: “Yes, I am very much a team player. In fact, many opportunities in both athletics and academics have developed my skills as a team player, both as a member and a team leader. I’ve seen the value of working as a team to achieve a greater goal than any of us could have achieved individually. Let me share the following example.”

Would you rather be in charge of a project or work as part of the team?

- » Different situations will call for different types of involvement. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate to the interviewer that you know when it is appropriate to lead and when it is better to follow: “I am happy to follow the leadership of someone else. In fact, some of the best learning experiences have come in that manner. I must be honest, though, to say that it has been very encouraging in the past when the group decided that I would be the best person to lead the project. I’m honestly very happy in either role.” Provide an example of a positive change you brought to your workplace or an organization you are involved in.

What are your long-term goals? Where do you want to be in 5, 10, or 15 years?

- » Spend quality time reflecting on this question prior to the interview. Have several professional goals in mind. You may want to research a typical career path for a person that is successful with this employer. Tell the manager you plan to be working for him or her in that position: “Although it’s certainly difficult to predict things that far into the future, I know what direction I want my career path to follow. Within the next five years, I would like to become the best ___ your company has. I will work towards becoming the expert that others rely on. And, in doing so, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long term.”

Give me an example of a time when_.

- » Whenever you are given a question starting with give me an example when or tell me about a time when, know that it is a behavioral question. The interviewer is trying to determine how you would behave in specific situations common in the workplace. Knowing your past behavior will facilitate predicting your future behavior. Common behavioral questions fall in the areas of teamwork, conflict resolution, or leadership. Think “story” when you are asked

a behavioral question. You may find it helpful to tell your 2-minute story using the “STAR” format. Tell about a situation and tasks. Explain the actions you took. Many people drop the ball at this point by neglecting to finish the story with the result. Explain a quantifiable result that was achieved and emphasize the role you played in the successful outcome. Work-related examples may be more effective than school-related examples.

What motivates you?

- » There are many potentially effective answers; however, money is not necessarily the best answer. Are you motivated by solving problems, helping people, a sense of accomplishment, or the respect of others? The possibilities are endless. Make your response honest and personal: “Having responsibilities and being acknowledged when the job is done well is very motivating for me.”

What kind of salary are you looking for today?

- » You should know what a competitive salary is for the position, but you do not offer a figure. Quoting a figure too low may get you an offer that is too low, or may communicate that your qualifications are not up to par. A number that is higher than the employer has in mind may knock you out of the running. Respond by saying that you expect to be compensated fairly for the education, skills, and qualifications that you bring to the job: “While finding the right opportunity is more important than money, I have looked at salary comparisons and the cost of living in the area. I would expect to receive compensation at a fair value for my skills and qualifications.” You may choose to politely transform your answer into a question for the employer: “While I am aware of the general salary range in the industry, I have no set salary. What salary is usually offered to someone with my qualifications?” If the interviewer persists, respond that your market research shows that salaries fall in the range of _ to _, but avoid setting an exact figure for yourself.

Do you have any questions?

- » This is one of the most often overlooked questions by candidates, and as a result, candidates are often ill-prepared. One or two strategic and purposeful questions can make a huge difference in the interview. Asking quality questions reflects your interest level and initiative: “Could you tell me what characteristics the ideal candidate possesses?” After the interviewer responds, you then have the opportunity to add any information you may have inadvertently omitted. You may also highlight your own qualifications as they relate to the interviewer’s answer. Remember that if an employer supplies you with literature about the organization before the interview, it is assumed that you will read it, study it, and formulate your questions from it. Make certain that your questions are relevant and not easily found on the company website or on a brochure that you failed to read.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Your Turn to Ask Questions

- » In advance, write down big-picture questions that address large organizational issues, such as company goals, educational philosophy, industry questions, etc.
- » Take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions because it allows you to demonstrate a sincere interest and curiosity in both the position and organization as well as to establish rapport with the interviewer and clarify any uncertainties.
- » Consider asking a question that shows you did research and builds off of company knowledge and content discussed in your interview.
- » Do not, in the first interview, ask any questions related to salary, vacation, holidays, or other benefits. These questions are best addressed at a later time.
- » Questions during the interview should pertain to specific details of the position, in-depth facts about the organization that could not be obtained through your employer research, and/ or points needing clarification that arise from the interview.

The interview is certainly an opportunity for an employer to decide if you are the best candidate for the position. Do not forget, however, that it is also an opportunity for you to decide if the position and organization are good matches for you.

The questions you ask during an interview come from two sources

- » First, always prepare at least four or five questions before the interview and have them listed in your portfolio so you can access them during the interview.
- » Second, as the interview progresses, note any unclear points which may be clarified when you ask other questions.

When should you ask your questions?

- » As an interview draws to a close, employers typically ask, “Do you have any questions?” This inquiry opens the door of opportunity for you to gather more information about the employer.
- » If an employer does not think to ask for your questions, you may want to politely ask permission at the conclusion of the interview.
- » Be careful not to interrogate an interviewer with a lengthy list of questions. Basic information about the prospective employer should be obtained through researching both the employer and the position prior to your interview, not by asking questions during the interview.

Avoid the “What’s in it for me” questions.

- » Questions regarding salary, benefits, or vacation should be avoided during an initial interview.
- » The initial interview should focus on what you can provide to the employer as opposed to what the employer can do for you.
- » Be prepared to negotiate your salary and benefit requirements during a subsequent interview, or after an offer has been extended. Remember that it is always the employer who raises the topic. However, if the interviewer introduces the issues of salary and benefits, do not avoid discussing them.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK AN EMPLOYER

- » I am very interested in this position. What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- » Can you give me an example of the types of projects that I would have the opportunity to work on?
- » How are individual careers managed? Will I have input into the process concerning my corporate growth?
- » Please tell me about your performance review process. Who evaluates employee performance and how is success measured?
- » How would you describe the culture at this company?
- » What are the short term and long term strategic directions for your company? How does this position contribute to those goals?
- » What have you found most rewarding about working for this company? What factors have contributed to your success?
- » What advice would you have for someone entering the company in this position?
- » How does this position contribute to the organization’s success?
- » What do you hope I will accomplish in this position?
- » What was the department’s biggest challenge last year and what did you learn from it?
- » How much time do the owners/leaders/founders spend in the office?
- » In what ways do you see the company giving back to the community?
- » What continuing learning opportunities do you have for your employees?

Day-to-day responsibilities

- » Could you please tell me about a typical day in the position?
- » What are the team's work hours? Are there any specific requirements for time in the office?
- » Do employees control the structure of their goals and tasks?
- » How does management deliver feedback to employees?

Future Opportunities

- » Do you have a formal mentorship program or are there mentors available?
- » How have you had the ability to grow in your role?
- » What is the typical career path for someone who starts in this role?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Follow Up

- » You should ask the interviewer for a business card or contact information. If you forget, you may ask career services for the information.
- » Send a thank you note to each interviewer. A handwritten note is preferred, but you may need to follow up via email if they are moving quickly with the selection process. Thank you cards are available at the Eastin Center for Career Readiness (155 Business) and in the central Career Services office (360 Student Union.)
- » The note can be handwritten on a thank you card or typed as a business letter; however, handwritten notes are more personal.
- » Based on your questions during your interview, you should have an understanding of the timeline of when you will hear back from the employer. If you don't hear back from them after a reasonable amount of time, follow up with a phone call or email.