# THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The job interview provides you and a prospective employer with the opportunity to discuss your qualifications and determine if you are a good match for a position. You should always approach an interview in a business-like manner, which means research, preparation, and professionalism are essential. The purpose of the interview is not only for the interviewer to assess who you are and your qualifications, but also for you to assess whether the position and the company environment are a good fit for you - remember, this is your career.

## How to Prepare for Your Interview

Preparation is the key to successful interviewing. Whether you are interviewing for an internship, co-op, or full-time job, doing your research and preparing ahead of time will help you make a good impression and demonstrate your interest in the position. You should expect to spend at least 2 hours preparing for your interview, and probably longer if you are seeking a full-time position. It is completely normal to feel nervous going into an interview, but being as prepared as possible will help you feel confident and do well.

The Career Development Center (CDC) recommends that your preparation involves researching the following areas:

### THE COMPANY

**WHAT TO PREPARE**

**Know about the company with whom you are interviewing:**
- What does the company do?
- What products or services does it provide?
- What industry is it in?
- Is it working on any new projects or initiatives?
- Has it been in the news recently?
- What is its reputation in the field?
- What makes it unique from its competitors?
- Why do you want to work for that company specifically?

**HOW TO PREPARE**

**Sources:**
- Company website
- News
- Company social media sites
- Annual Report
- Hoover's Company Profiles Database (accessible through Gordon Library website under databases)
- Glassdoor company profile
- Gordon Library company information databases (search by subject)
- Alumni or personal connections

### THE POSITION

**WHAT TO PREPARE**

**Know about the job you are applying for:**
- Prepare examples of how you have done each task or displayed each skill listed in the job description.
- Research anything you are not familiar with in the job description.
- Be able to speak to which tasks excite you the most and which ones you want to learn more about.

**HOW TO PREPARE**

**Research:**
- Read the job description (tasks, qualifications, requirements).
- Look up anything with which you are not familiar.

## YOURSELF

**WHAT TO PREPARE**

**Know how to talk about yourself:**
- Prepare a two-minute response to the question, "Tell me about yourself."
- Make sure you can talk about everything on your resume and how it relates to the job.
- Know how to connect your education, experiences, and skills back to the job.
- Be prepared to talk about your strengths and weaknesses.

**HOW TO PREPARE**

**Research:**
- Complete your resume.
- Be able to talk about your strengths, weaknesses, academic performance, career interests, personal goals, work experience, special skills, and values.

## The Day of Your Interview

### When to Arrive

You should arrive at least 10-15 minutes early for your appointment. Plan how you will get to the company ahead of time and test the route, if possible. On the day of the interview, leave plenty of extra time to account for traffic and other unforeseen circumstances. If you arrive late, you set a poor first impression and could miss the opportunity to interview altogether if the interviewer has a schedule to maintain.

### What to Bring

1. Extra copies of resume
2. Reference list
3. Supporting documents, such as a portfolio (if applicable)
4. Questions prepared to ask the interviewer (at least 3-4)
5. Directions to the interview
6. Company contact name and phone numbers in case of an emergency

### What to Wear

Some company representative will tell you what type of dress is appropriate for the interview, but often they will not. It is important for you to dress up. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

- **Consider company culture** – some companies have a very casual dress code while others are very formal.

- **It is best to be conservative** – you should present a professional image. This includes limiting colorful/funky hairstyles, overly bold clothing, or excessive body piercings/visible tattoos. Remember, it is always best to be overdressed than underdressed.

- **Maintain excellent personal hygiene** – keep your nails trimmed and clean, wear deodorant, be sure your hair is neat, check that your clothing is clean and wrinkle-free, and be sure you have fresh breath.

### WHAT TO WEAR

- **Suits:** dark color (gray, navy, black) add: or coordinating style, skirts knee length or longer
- **Dresses:** solid, skirts knee length or longer
- **Shirt:** solid color, nothing sheer or low cut
- **Tie:** conservative, not too bright/busy pattern
- **Shoes:** polished, low heel, dress shoes, no boots
- **Blouses:** nothing sheer or low cut
- **Hair:** neat and off your face
- **Makeup:** subtle
- **Socks:** dark/matching socks (no white)
- **Jewelry:** small earrings – keep it simple

## How to Prepare for an IQP Interview

Prepare to answer several key questions:

### The Site

- What is your number one site? What others are you open to?

- Why do you want to be at that site? Did you attend information sessions?

- What projects have been done in the past? With what organizations? Why are you interested?

- Look up projects on **Gordon Library website**, find project reports, look for IQP and MQP reports

### The IQP

- What preparation do you have for the IQP experience/project?

- What relevant skills do you have?

- What do you hope to get out of your IQP experience?

### You

- Who you are

- What are your strenghts (3) and weaknesses (1-2)

- What are your skills?

- List relevant experiences, academic performance, non-academic interests, and what you do in your spare time (e.g., favorite books, movies, bands).

Please note, this is not a complete list. These are just a few areas to begin thinking about.

## Interview Guidelines: Make a Good Impression

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

1. Arrive early
2. Dress conservatively and professionally
3. Introduce yourself with a strong, confident handshake
   - If you are sitting when you meet the interviewer, stand to shake their hand and make eye contact
   - Make sure your handshake is firm and your palms are dry
4. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer
5. Speak in a clear tone of voice (not too quiet or too fast, and do not mumble)
6. Be alert, listen carefully, and maintain good posture. Always sit up straight
7. Express a sincere interest in the position – show enthusiasm (even if it's not your first choice)
8. Demonstrate knowledge of the company (industry, products, services, etc.)

## The Interview

### What Is the Interviewer Looking For?

The interviewer is trying to determine two things:

1. Whether you are qualified for the position (do you have the right skills? experience? knowledge?)

2. Whether your personality is a good fit for the company (are you likeable? a team player? will you fit in with the team?)

### Types of Interview Questions

- **Directed/Structured:** consists of a list of specific questions asked in order. They are commonly used for phone interviews, first-round screening interviews, and on-campus interviews

- **Non-directed/Unstructured:** uses broad, open-ended questions designed to make you "open up" and talk about yourself. They are more conversational than the directed interview and are commonly used for second-round on-site interviews.

- **Behavioral:** asks about specific situations from your past and how you acted in them. The approach is based on the premise that the best predictors of future performance are past actions. They are commonly infused into the two previous styles, though some interviews are strictly behavioral.

- **Stress/Technical:** designed to put you under pressure to see how you handle the situation. Questions are often test-like, such as solving a problem, drawing a diagram, or presenting on a topic. Pure stress interviews are not common, but some stress questions may be asked during other types, especially for positions in Computer Science, Electrical & Computer Engineering, and Consulting.

  If you are asked a technical question for which you do not know the answer, do not panic. Try to think through the quesiton out loud so your interviewer can hear you, and ultimately admit that you do not know the answer, but explain what resources you would utilize to find the answer (a colleague, the Internet, a book). Sometimes, employers are more interested in watching how you handle stress and your resourcefulness than in seeing you answer the problem correctly.

- **Overnight/Group:** typically conducted after a first-round interview and involves a networking/ social event during which your interactions with others are observed. The interview itself is often with multiple people and may include a test or presentation. You will usually be informed of this in advance, though not always. Companies will generally pay for associated costs, but it is important to confirm this with them.

- **Presentation:** Some interviews might require you to give a presentation. Make sure you know what the main purpose of the presentation interview is, such as your leadership, problem solving, or selling. It is important that you prepare and practice, and know the length of time you have. Know what type of equipment the company has to present a Powerpoint presentation and/or handouts. Treat the interview presentation with professionalism.

## Phases of Interview

1. **Breaking the Ice:** consists of small talk or a broad, open-ended question, such as "tell me about yourself." Although seemingly informal, this is an important part of the interview process.

2. **Sharing of General Information:** the interviewer tells you about the company and open position(s). You should share how your skills relate to the position, being concise and using specific examples.

3. **Sharpening of Focus:** the interviewer asks questions about your qualifications, work-related values, goals, etc. You will provide a lot of information about yourself and also assess whether the position and company match your goals and personality.

4. **Closure:** you will be asked if you have any questions and should take the opportunity to find out the process for next steps, including how soon a decision will be made, how you will be informed of decision, and what to do if you don't hear from the company within that time. You also want to ask poignant questions to learn more about the team, company culture, and any other aspects that will help you evaluate the role and organization.

## Answering Interview Questions Using the Star Method

Although there is no "correct" answer to any interview question, you should answer all questions completely and provide adequate context and detail. We recommend using the STAR Method, which stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result. By following this method, you provide the interviewer with the context, the goal, problem, or your role, the steps you took, and the results associated with a situation.

The STAR Method is particularly useful for behavioral questions, which typically begin with, "Tell me about a time when…" or "Describe a situation where you…" You should try to show how the past experience or skill would benefit you in the position for which you are interviewing.

**Sample Question:**
"Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a team member. How did you handle the situation?"

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| **SITUATION** | **Describe a situation you encountered that relates to the question.** Provide some brief context for the situation/project/problem – set the stage | *"When I was working on a group project in my Introduction to Engineering Design course, one of the members of my team would consistently show up late or not show up at all to our team meetings."* |
| **TASK** | **Describe the tasks involved in the situation.** State the goal, the problem, or your role | *"As the team leader I had to be the one to address the member who wasn't upholding his responsibilities."* |
| **ACTION** | **Specify what actions you took to complete the tasks and achieve your results.** This will be the majority of your answer | *"I contacted the teammate to schedule a one-on-one meeting. I provided examples of meetings where this had been an issue and shared how it was affecting our team members. I asked him for his perspective on why he was missing a lot of our meetings and he told me many of our meetings conflicted with his practice schedule. We decided to move our meetings to an hour later so that they did not conflict with his athletic commitments."* |
| **RESULT** | **What results followed due to your actions?** It's okay if the result was negative – just talk after that about what you learned from it and what you would do differently next time | *"At our next meeting, he apologized to the group for not communicating his problem. He was able to attend every meeting since and we earned an A on our project. I learned the importance of clear, face-to-face communication, getting others' point of view, and not making assumptions."* |
| | **Connect your answer to the job** This will strengthen your answer | *"This position requires a lot of team projects where there is bound to be conflict from time to time. I think my ability to address conflict directly and respectfully would be a great asset."* |

## Questions for the Interviewer

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will likely ask if you have any questions for them. You should prepare 3-4 logical well-thought-out questions that demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the position. If you do not ask any questions, or if you ask questions that you should already know the answer to, the recruiter may think you did not prepare or are not very interested in the position.

Remember, interviewing is not a one-way exchange of information. You are also evaluating and interviewing the company to determine whether the culture and the position are a good fit for you. Think about what you want to know about the company to help make a good career decision.

## Sample Questions for the Interviewer

Remember, these are examples only. Not all of these questions will be relevant or appropriate to every job. If you do use these questions, be sure you understand what they mean. It is helpful to develop your own questions and express them in your personal style, but this list can be used as a reference:

1. What kinds of assignments might I expect during the first six months on the job?

2. Does your company encourage further education?

3. How would my performance be evaluated?

4. In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?

5. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?

6. What is the largest single problem facing your staff (or department) now?

7. What is the training process like for this position?

8. What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?

9. What skills are especially important for someone in this position?

10. What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?

11. Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?

12. What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you, or should I contact you?

### CDC SERVICES TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR INTERVIEWING SKILLS:

**Interviewing Skills (30 minutes):**

Learn about interviewing skills, how to prepare for an interview, and how to best answer questions and be successful in an interview. It is recommended to do an interview skills appointment prior to a mock interview, but it is not required.

**Mock Interview (60 minutes):**

Participate in a pratice interview with a CDC staff member, which includes a recorded interview, review, and a critique with advice on interview strengths and areas of development. These are helpful if you have an interview coming up or if you want some general interviewing practice.

## Situations You May Encounter

1. **You need to think about how to answer a question.**
   It is perfectly okay to pause before answering a question. An employer will prefer that you give some thought to your answer rather than blurting out a disorganized response.

2. **You don't understand the question.**
   It is fine to ask the interviewer for clarification to ensure that you can answer the question properly.

3. **You don't know the answer to the question or you have not done something they ask about.**
   It is better to admit that you don't know the answer than to try to make something up. Turn your response into a positive by telling the interviewer

about a similar experience, describing where you would go to find more information, or stating that you are looking forward to learning more.

4. **The interviewer asks you an illegal question.** Questions pertaining to your age, national origin, race, gender, religion, citizenship, certain physical data, and marital status are all prohibited by federal law. If an interviewer asks you about these topics, you can respond in different ways:

   1. If you are comfortable answering the question, you may. However, you do not have to.

   2. If you do not wish to answer the question:

      a. Politely express to the interviewer that you prefer to keep the focus on items that are directly relevant to the position.

      b. Inquire as to how this information relates to the job, as you prefer to keep the content focused on your professional qualifications.

*Please let the CDC know if you encounter any illegal questions on a job interview.*

## Questions Commonly Asked by Employers

Below is a small sample of possible questions you should consider when preparing for your interview. However, since you could be asked anything, the best way to give a strong answer is to thoroughly prepare and be confident.

### Personal

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. What are your hobbies?

3. What do you like to do in your spare time?

4. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?

5. Why do you want to work for Company X?

6. What made you interested in this job?

7. Describe your ideal job.

8. What can you offer us?

9. What are your three best qualifications for this position?

10. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?

11. Can you name some weaknesses of yours?

12. Define success. Define failure.

13. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?

14. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?

15. What motivates you most in a job?

16. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker and how did you handle it?

17. Why should we hire you over another candidate?

18. What do you know about our organization (products/services)?

19. Do you plan to return to school for further education?

20. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

21. Which is more important to you – the money or the type of job?

22. Describe a time when you were forced to make an uncomfortable decision? What did you do?

23. Give me an example of a time you had to make a quick decision without supervision.

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24. Tell me about a bad experience working in a team environment. How was it resolved?

## Education

25. Why did you choose your major?

26. Why did you choose to attend your college or university?

27. Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?

28. In which campus activities did you participate?

29. Which classes in your major did you like best? Least? Why?

30. Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?

31. If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?

32. Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?

33. Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?

## Experience

34. What job-related skills have you developed?

35. Did you work while going to school? In what positions?

36. What did you learn from these work experiences?

37. What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?

38. Have you ever quit a job? Why?

39. Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.

40. Give an example of a time in which you worked under the pressure of a deadline.

41. Have you ever done any volunteer work? What kind?

42. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

## Career Goals

43. What are your long-term career goals?

44. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?

45. What kind of boss/supervisor do you prefer?

46. Would you be successful working with a team?

47. Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?

48. What other types of positions are you considering?

49. How do you feel about working in a structured environment?

50. Are you able to work on several assignments at once?

51. How do you feel about working overtime?

52. How do you feel about travel?

53. How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?

54. Are you willing to work flextime?

# After the Interview

## Additional Information

If your interviewer requests additional information that you did not have during your interview, such as transcripts or credentials, provide them as soon as possible after the interview.

## References

The employer will often tell you how many references they want, but in general you should have a list of 3-5 individuals. Ask people who can speak to your skills and

professionalism, such as professors, supervisors, coaches, and advisors. You must get each person's permission before listing them as a reference. Once they agree, provide them with a copy of your resume, and let them know after your interview that they may be contacted.

Provide the employer with your reference list including the name, title, company, address, phone number, and email address of each reference. You may include a sentence explaining what your relationship is with each person. You do not need a reference letter unless the company specifically asks for it.

## Thank You Notes

Writing a thank you note to your interviewer as soon as possible after your interview can help set you apart from other candidates, but make sure you PROOFREAD! A well written note can help get you a job, but a poorly written note can have the opposite effect.

**When should I write a thank you note?**

Within a few days of the interview, information session, career fair, informational interview, networking event, or any other time you interact with an employer.

**Should I send it through email or write it by hand?**

Email and handwritten notes are equally acceptable. Email is quicker and may be preferable if you know the employer is making a quick decision. Handwritten notes make you stand out and are great if you know the company will be taking longer to make a decision – be sure to write legibly or type it.

**How long should it be?**

Your note should not be more than 1-2 paragraphs.

**What do I write?**

Thank the interviewer for their time. Remind them of your conversation by highlighting it, elaborating on it, or adding new information. Convey your enthusiasm for working at the company, and ask any outstanding questions or share additional information. Wrap up with a reminder of your gratitude and a soft request for further action.

## Following Up

If the interviewer tells you their time frame, make a note to yourself to follow up with them if you do not hear back within that time. As a general guideline, you should follow up in two weeks if you have not heard anything. You should contact the interviewer by phone to ask where they are in the process of selecting a candidate.