Ten Tips for Your Next Interview

1. **DO YOUR RESEARCH** - *Know as much as you can about the company you are interviewing with.* Go beyond the "basics" by looking into things like future projects, industry trends, clients, mission and culture.
   - Review business journals, LinkedIn, Google, or other on-line resources for up-to-date information about recent events, news, or announcements.
   - What type of direction the company is headed in? For example, have they just signed a new client or secured a major contract? Are they breaking into a new market or pursuing a new venture?
   - Be very familiar with their website – especially "About Us" and their mission statement.
   - If you have contacts there, talk to them about their position/work.
   - Know industry trends **–** Prove you're interested and curious about the industry. Use industry-specific language and be up to date with future trends.

2. **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE** – *Just because you are a "people person" doesn't mean you'll automatically ace the interview.* Be comfortable talking about yourself, your goals, activities, projects, employment, etc. Complete a mock interview at the Career Center to get feedback from a career counselor. Utilize Big Interview for virtual practice. *Glassdoor* and the employer section of *Handshake* provide feedback from past candidates about interview questions they've received.

3. **BE EARLY & BE POLITE –** Make sure you know where the interview is taking place before the day of. *If in person*, plan your route/method of travel early and keep things like traffic and delays in mind. *If virtual*, make sure you've tested your tech, log-in early, and have a back-up means of reaching out in case technology fails. **Remember** that everyone you meet on the day of the interview, from the secretary to the first-year associate to the managing director is involved in evaluating you, even if it is informally. Be pleasant and respectful to everyone you encounter.

4. **DRESS AND ACT APPROPRIATELY –** *First impressions last!* Wear appropriate attire depending on your industry and preference. This may mean a formal suit (common in industries like financial services) or more business casual attire (usually seen in non-profits and less business-driven industries). Regardless, make sure you maintain a neat, clean, professional, and distraction-free appearance. When in doubt about the dress code for an interview, ask! **BE FRIENDLY & ENGAGED –** This could include a firm handshake or other warm greeting, maintaining eye contact, straight posture, and a smile/positive demeanor. **AVOID BEING INFORMAL -** Avoid slang and overly familiar language. Avoid filler language such as "like" or "ummm." Address your interviewer(s) with whatever name/title they introduce themselves. **KEEP EVERYTHING POSITIVE.** Speak about yourself, even your weaknesses, in a positive light of growth and curiosity. SELL yourself and your skills! If they ask you to speak about difficult past experiences or employers, don't dwell on the negatives or speak poorly of anyone.

5. **ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS –** *Your answers should be concise but also complete.*
   - Make sure you begin with the answer to their question and then follow up with examples and additional information.
   - The more you practice and become familiar with questions that could potentially be asked, the more comfortable and organized you will be. The job description is a great resource to help you anticipate questions in advance.
   - Don't be afraid to pause for a second before beginning your answer.
   - Don't "talk yourself into an answer" by speaking in circles. Think first and then provide the best possible specific details to back up your claims.
   - If a question is asked and you are unsure of the answer, (1) talk about how you would go about figuring out the answer to that question. For example, if they ask how you would determine a business's worth, think about the steps involved and how you begin to analyze and gather data. Or (2) discuss a time you were in a similar situation or had to figure out something without all the information and how you did so successfully.

6. BE SPECIFIC – *This is one of the most important points. Don't just tell an interviewer that you're great – tell them WHY you are great for THEM!* In other words, **sell, don't tell**. Not only explain what you did, but why it is significant.

- For a question like "What are your top 3 strengths?"- don't just list them. Explain how you have **proven** it throughout your college experience (i.e. an internship, project, activity, leadership position, etc.).
- Express a sincere interest in their organization/position by relaying how you are a great fit for them based on your company research and understanding of the position (from research, job description, people you've spoken to)
- Employers WANT to hear about your role in a group project, what you accomplished as a member of a club/organization, what you were responsible for at a past internship). **THESE THINGS ARE WHAT MAKES YOU MEMORABLE.**
- Essentially, how are you going to set yourself apart from the other candidates interviewing for the same position?

  For example: **Do NOT say:** "I am an extremely creative individual. I love to think of new ideas. I'm also organized and adaptable."

  INSTEAD say: "I am an extremely creative individual by nature. For example, most recently in my marketing class, I worked with a group of 5 students to develop a new mock product line for a company. I worked primarily on the print advertising campaign which utilized short, catchy slogans and realistic photos of objects to lead the viewer to question and ponder the product line. In terms of organization and adaptability, I led a Habitat for Humanity trip over Spring Break last year which required fundraising, working with a group of 11 fellow students as well as residents of Costa Rica to build 6 houses in 7 days."

7. MAKE A BRIDGE BETWEEN YOU AND THE EMPLOYER – *Again, this is one of the most important points. What are they looking for and how do YOU connect with that?* What types of things are mentioned in their job description? How do have you demonstrated those skills? Those are huge indicators in terms of the things you want to highlight in the interview.

- Prove you are the right person for the position by showing them how you fit in with what they are looking for.
- Integrate your pre-interview research into both your answers to their questions as well as the questions you ask them. For example, you may ask, "How has <u>XYZ</u> changed the way you do business on a day-to-day basis?"

8. ASK QUESTIONS – *Prove that you have been thinking about the process of interviewing by asking questions that reflect your knowledge of the field and/or position. Do NOT ask questions that raise "red flags" such as salary, vacation etc. The company should bring up salary first. Also, avoid questions that can be easily answered by the organization's webpage.*

- For example, "How do you feel the current industry standards will affect your company in the near future?"
- "In this role, will I gain a lot of broad experience, or will I be specializing in one particular area?"
- "How will the acquisition of _____ new client become significant?"
- "What do *you* think is the single most important quality someone must have to succeed in this role?" *This allows you to reinforce that YOU have that skillset if you haven't already discussed it in the interview.*
- "When can I expect to hear from you?" or "What are the next steps in the interview process?"

9. SEND A THANK YOU NOTE – *Send a prompt, emailed (or handwritten if you prefer) thank you note to all individuals you interviewed with. This is NOT optional.*

- Ask for business cards or contact information while at the interview.
- Send your thank you note(s) immediately (within 24 hours).
- Personalize your message. Mention something that struck you from the interview (i.e. that was particularly interesting or that you learned). Feel free to follow up with any questions or information you did not feel you answered sufficiently.

10. REFLECT & EVALUATE – *Is this a place you think you would enjoy working? Do you feel comfortable in the environment? Can you see yourself in this role? Does it align with your career goals and skills you wish to gain?*

- Remember, part of an interview is also deciding if this is the type of position you would accept.
- Ask questions to determine if this is the right position for you. One way to think about it is – If you were offered the same position at a different company, what would the deciding factors be to help you determine your decision?
- Follow up if you have questions about the position or search status. Reiterate your interest in the position when speaking with representatives of the organization.

Career Competencies & Interviews

NACE (National Association of Colleges & Employers) Career Readiness Competencies are essential for interviews because they provide a standardized framework that helps employers assess candidates' skills, abilities, and potential for success in the workplace. These competencies serve as a common language between employers, interviews and job seekers, enabling a more objective and meaningful evaluation process. Here are the 8 competencies to reflect upon as you prepare your interview examples:

- Career & Self-Development
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Equity & Inclusion

- Leadership
- Professionalism
- Teamwork
- Technology

Questions to Ask Potential Employers

The Career Center often gets asked "What are *good* questions to ask during my interview?" The truth is, there's no one right answer. **The best questions to ask are those that are unique and memorable, *but more importantly,* ones that actually help to inform your decision about whether you want to work for this company.** If you can find it out from looking at the website, it's probably not a strong question. Consider what is really important to you (outside of salary, benefits, and work flexibility/hours) and design some questions to get at those points. It's generally recommended that conversations about salary and benefits wait until you've received the offer.

- What kinds of projects or assignments can I expect to work on?
- Can you describe the company culture and work environment?
- What are the opportunities for professional growth and advancement within the company?
- How does the company support employee development and learning?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the team or department right now?
- How is success measured for this position?
- How does the company foster teamwork and collaboration?
- What is the preferred communication style within the team?
- How does the company promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace?
- What do you think is the most important quality to be successful in this role?

STAR Method: Behavioral Interviewing

The **STAR Interview Method** is a structured behavioral interviewing technique used by employers to assess a candidate's past experiences and behavioral responses to specific situations. Behavioral interview questions are ones that typically start with "Tell me about a time when…" or "Describe a situation where…" STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result, and it provides a systematic and succinct way for candidates to showcase their abilities and accomplishments in a coherent and organized manner. Here's a summary of each component:

Situation:
The candidate describes the context or situation they encountered in a previous job or experience. This sets the stage for the interviewer to understand the circumstances in which the candidate had to act.

Task:
The candidate explains the specific task or challenge they faced in that situation. It highlights the goals they needed to achieve or the problem they had to solve.

Action:
The candidate details the actions they took to address the situation and fulfill the task. This part focuses on the candidate's skills, decision-making process, and how they approached the challenge.

Result:
The candidate discusses the outcome of their actions. Employers are interested in understanding the candidate's impact on the situation, the results they achieved, and how their actions contributed to the overall success or failure.

Example of A STAR Answer

Let's use the STAR interview method to craft an example answer for the question, "Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a challenging team member." (*Use [STAR Response Worksheet](#) to draft your answers.*)

Situation: During my time as a Marketing Intern, I was assigned to a team of five members responsible for different aspects of the campaign, such as content creation, design, social media and analytics.

Task: Another team intern– let's call him Alex - was consistently missing deadlines and failing to deliver the quality of work expected. This was causing delays and affecting the overall success of the campaign.

Action: To address the situation, I decided to have a one-on-one meeting to understand the underlying issues. I approached the conversation with empathy and a willingness to listen. My team member confided that he was struggling to manage his workload and was unsure about some of the tasks assigned to him. Together, we called a group meeting to clarify roles, offer extra support, create a realistic timeline and implement more regular check-ins to monitor progress on the project.

Result: After that, Alex's performance significantly improved. He was meeting deadlines consistently and delivering better quality work. The team became more collaborative, and we successfully completed the marketing campaign on time.

Other Types of Interviews

Case Interviews: You are presented with a hypothetical business situation and asked to analyze and solve the problem. It's meant to determine how a candidate solves problems and approaches complex situations. Common in the consulting field.

Technical Interviews: Assess your knowledge and technical skills in a particular area. Common in Engineering and Tech. In Big Tech and Software Engineering roles, for example, coding assessments are often given.

Other Assessments: Candidates are sometimes presented with assessments as part of the interview process – they could be logic questions, skills assessments, or personality tests. Usually, these are given in the early interview stages.

Tips for Phone & Virtual Interviews

Phone and virtual interviews have become increasingly common, especially in situations where in-person meetings are not feasible. Here are some essential tips to help you excel in phone and virtual interviews:

1. Test your technology: Ensure that your phone or computer, as well as any required software or applications, are in good working condition well in advance. Test your audio, video, and internet connection beforehand to avoid any technical issues during the interview. It's always a good idea to have a backup means on contacting your interviewer in case technology fails.

2. Choose the right location: Find a quiet, well-lit space for your interview. Remove any distractions or potential interruptions. For virtual, a neutral background is preferable, as it keeps the focus on you and avoids any visual distractions.

3. Dress professionally: Even though it's a virtual or phone interview, dress as you would for an in-person meeting. Wearing professional attire helps you feel more confident and shows your respect for the interview process. In a virtual setting, you are still on camera and want to show you're taking it seriously.

4. Maintain eye contact: During a virtual interview, it's essential to maintain eye contact with the camera rather than staring at the screen. This gives the impression of direct eye contact and engagement.

5. Practice active listening: Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and avoid interrupting. Take a brief pause before responding to ensure you understand the question fully, and then provide a thoughtful answer.

6. Prepare notes: One advantage of these interviews is that you can have some notes in front of you. Jot down key points, questions you want to ask, and prompts to remind you of specific examples that you want to refer to during the interview. Don't rely too heavily on your notes, however! You don't want to read from a script. Notes should just be quick prompts.

7. Be aware of body language: In a virtual interview, non-verbal cues still matter. Sit up straight, smile, and use hand gestures naturally when appropriate. Good body language projects confidence and engagement.

8. Minimize interruptions: Let others in your living space know about the interview to avoid interruptions. Silence your phone, close unnecessary applications on your computer, and disable notifications.

The Career Center's Employer Engagement Suite is available to reserve a private room for your upcoming virtual or phone interview (based on availability). Contact the Career Center at 610-519-4060 [or book online.](#)