

# Interviewing Guide



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page(s)
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Before the Interview</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Types of Interviews</b> .....	<b>4-6</b>
<b>Behavior Based Interviews</b> .....	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Typical Interview Questions</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Responding to “Tell me About Yourself”</b> .....	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Identify your Core Competencies</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Questions to Ask the Interviewer</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>After the Interview</b> .....	<b>11</b>

## INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWING



Congratulations! After working hard on your resume and cover letters, you've landed an interview. Now comes the hard part. Learning how to effectively articulate your skills, background and experience to potential employers is challenging and takes hard work. But, with adequate and proper preparation and practice you can go into interviews feeling confident and calm.

Remember...interviewing is a two-way street. While it gives the employer an opportunity to assess your "fit" for the organization and role, it also gives you a chance to learn more about the culture of the organization, the specifics of the job and whether or not this position will meet your needs and expectations. Make sure you've done your homework about the organization, are ready to articulate your skills and how they fit with the job, and are prepared to ask questions that are important to your understanding of the position.

This guide will outline what to do before, during and after an interview. It summarizes how to prepare for a variety of interview settings, what to expect during your interview and how to follow up so you're not left wondering what's next.

**Interviewing is a SKILL. It takes time to develop. The more you interview the better you'll get!**

## **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:**

Taking time to complete the following steps prior to your interview will go a long way in getting you ready:

1. **Know all the logistics of your interview:** This may seem self-evident, but many interviewees leave this for the last minute and risk the chance that they are late, overly anxious or forget something. Make sure you have all the contact information in one place: who you will be interviewing with, location, time, parking details and directions. If you can, do a trial run to get there so there are no surprises!
2. **What to bring:** Bring along a few copies of your resume, cover letter and supporting documents you may be asked for (such as transcript, references, examples of work).
3. **What to wear:** The key here is to know your audience: it's no longer "one style fits all" when it comes to dressing for interviews. Try to research the daily dress code for the organization and the position for which you're interviewing, but...when not sure, it's best to be conservative. Better to be too formal than too informal! If you're interviewing with a corporation, you should dress more formally than if you're interviewing with a nonprofit or creative organization. Formal, business attire means a dark, solid suit with dress shirt or blouse, tie and dress shoes. Business casual means slacks or a skirt with a button down shirt or sweater, dress socks and closed shoes. Whatever you do, look put-together! No ripped, wrinkled clothing.
4. **Research the organization:** Take time to learn about the organization and the position for which you're interviewing. Here are some guiding questions to help you conduct your research:
  - What products or services does the organization make, sell or provide?
  - Who are their competitors and how are they different?
  - Is it a public, private, non-profit organization, or government agency?
  - What is the organization's culture, mission, vision, and values?
  - What is the size of the organization? Are there multiple locations?
  - What skills and experiences does this organization value?
  - How is the organization structured? Where does this position fit into the structure?
  - Has this organization been in the news lately?
5. **Reflect on yourself:** Employers want to see that candidates are not only qualified for the position but will mesh well with the organization and the team. Being able to articulate your skills and experiences and how they relate to the position is crucial, but so is demonstrating your enthusiasm for the role and the organization. Spending time thinking about and practicing responses to typical and not so typical interview questions is essential to a successful interview.

## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS:**

Not all interviews are created equal! Employers now use a variety of types of interviews to help them screen and assess candidates. Each has its own challenges and understanding them can make a big difference in how well you handle them.

**Phone Interviews:** This is often the first step in the interview process and is used by employers as a cost efficient means of screening candidates before bringing them on site. You should prepare as you would for any “in-person” interview, keeping the following things in mind.

- Turn off your computer, tv and any extraneous noise and phone notifications that could distract you.
- Find a quiet, separate space for the interview.
- If you’re using a cell phone, make sure you have a strong connection.
- Have paper and pencil for notes, and water near you should you need it.
- Have your resume and key points nearby to refer to.
- Listen carefully and try not to interrupt!
- Remember to “voice” your enthusiasm for the position. Without visual cues it can be difficult for the employer to see your excitement for the job; make sure you express it verbally.

**Virtual/Skype Interviews:** Use of virtual interviewing is on the rise and provides employers with the added benefit of seeing you, compared to a phone interview. To prepare for this type of interview, do everything you would do for a phone interview, but also:

- Check your technology. Make sure you’re using a computer that has a camera and a microphone and check it all out **beforehand** to make sure it’s working.
- Turn off all distractions, including your phone, music, television, and any instant messaging apps and email on your computer.
- Dress for an interview! From top to bottom. Solids work best on camera.
- Make sure the interviewer(s) can hear and see you clearly, and that you can hear and see them.
- Sit up straight and try not to move around too much.
- Set up the webcam at eye level and look into the camera, not at the image of the interviewer on your computer screen. Otherwise it will appear that you are always looking down rather than at the interviewer.

**Pre-Recorded Interviews:** Many organizations are replacing phone interviews (screening interviews) with one-way recorded interviews. Instead of speaking with a person on camera, you’re given a link to a third-party platform which provides pre-recorded questions for you to answer. This gives employers the added advantages of interviewing more applicants with less staff time, making easier candidate comparisons and viewing the recordings when most convenient. For interviewees, this new method of interviewing can prove to be very challenging. The format tends to feel awkward, you lose the chance to ask questions of the interviewer and you receive no feedback from interacting with a person.

Some interviews provide the questions ahead of time and some don’t. All require you to record your responses to questions, within a certain time frame. You may only get the chance to record your answer once, so preparation is essential. In addition to all of the tips for virtual interviews above, you should also:

- Make sure you pay attention to all of the instructions provided, including time frame for completing the interview.
- Practice! Once you log on to the site, you're usually given sample questions for practice. Make sure you use them! This will help get you comfortable with the technology and format, and allow you to view your responses to improve your presentation style, before the actual interview begins.
- TRY TO RELAX!

**Group Interviews:** Sometimes employers will use a group interview to expedite the hiring process as well as see how a candidate stands out among other candidates, handles a new situation and works in a group setting. To help you stand out, consider doing the following:

- Prepare a good introduction of yourself to the group.
- Resist pulling out your phone while waiting for the interview to officially begin. Introduce yourself to the others; try to get a conversation going.
- Try to include others in your responses. Perhaps you can add something to what one of the other candidates said. Maybe you can remember the other candidates' names and use them in your responses.
- Don't try too hard to stand out...it could look like you're going overboard. Be yourself!
- Listen to what the others are saying and make sure your body language shows engagement and interest in the group.

**Behavior Based Interviews:** This type of interview is based on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. Rather than ask you about potential situations you might face on the job, the interviewer focuses on questions that highlight the skills and competencies they are looking for in employees. Candidates are asked to talk about past situations and how they handled them, in order to assess their actual experience and ability to handle similar situations on the job. ***Behavior based questions tend to be probing and specific.***

Here's an example of a behavior based question:

*"Tell me about a time when you had to work as part of a team. Describe your role on the team and how you contributed to the team's goals."*

**How to Respond to Behavior Based Questions:**

Developing strong, specific responses to behavior based questions takes time, but the process of reviewing your past work history and finding concrete examples to demonstrate your competencies goes a long way in preparing you for the interview.

Consider the following steps when preparing for behavior based interviews:

1. Review the job listing/description and develop a list of skills the interviewer might be looking for in candidates.

2. Review your background and experience and find examples of times you've demonstrated these skills.
3. Outline some examples, or stories, that demonstrate these competencies. Your "story" should have a beginning, middle and an end.
4. Think about having some examples of situations with negative outcomes too. You may be asked about situations which were challenging and what you learned from them.
5. **Use the STAR format below to tell your story.**
6. Practice!

**STAR format:**

S = Situation (describe the situation you were in)  
 T = Task (describe the tasks you had to complete)  
 A = Action (describe the action you took in the situation)  
 R = Result (describe the end result of your actions)



Example:

*Question:* "Tell me about a time you demonstrated creative thinking in order to get a task completed."

*Response:* Last year, I was the Vice President of the Geology Club (Situation). Membership had declined over the past years and we wanted to do something about that (Task). Since our budget was limited, we had to decide how to creatively market the club to the student body. I came up with the idea of a "t-shirt giveaway", which our organization had never done before. In addition to designing the t-shirt, I arranged for a variety of venues on campus where we could distribute the t-shirts, which also worked to increase our exposure to the student body (Action). In the ended we produced and distributed 150 shirts and as a result, our membership increased by 20% that year (Result).

*Some behavior based questions:*

- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem.
- Please describe a time when you had to persuade someone to do something.
- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?
- Tell me about a time when you achieved a great deal in a short amount of time.

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a personality conflict at work.
- Give an example of a time when you worked on a team and things didn't go well. What happened?
- Give an example of a situation when you had to handle multiple responsibilities at the same time.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a situation when events and circumstances changed rapidly.
- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?
- Sometimes it's just not possible to get everything on your to-do list done. Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?
- Tell me about a situation where you took initiative on the job.

### **TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

Below is a sampling of typical questions often asked during interviews. The first one, "tell me about yourself", is usually the opener for the interview and you should spend time thinking about how you will respond.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your long and short range goals?
3. What do you look for in an employer?
4. Explain what you found to be the most valuable part of your education.
5. Why did you choose your major? What did you get from it?
6. Why did you choose Skidmore?
7. Describe your ideal job.
8. What strengths would you bring to this position?
9. What has been your biggest achievement? Why?
10. How has your education prepared you for this job?
11. What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
12. Do you prefer working independently or on a team?
13. What qualifications do you have that make you the most successful candidate?
14. Why should we hire you?
15. How can you contribute to this organization?
16. What do you know about our organization?
17. How do your skills relate to our needs?
18. What do you think it takes to be successful in a position like this?
19. What is your greatest strength? Weakness?
20. What do you expect to be doing in 3-5 years?

### **How to respond to: "Tell me about yourself?"**

There is no "right" answer to this question but there are many ways to respond incorrectly! Avoid responding to this question by doing the following:

- Don't repeat verbatim what's on your resume or cover letter.
- Don't tell your whole life story.
- Don't ask: "What would you like to know?"
- Don't discuss your personal views on sensitive topics.
- Don't present a long monologue. Keep it to 60 seconds or less!



In order to prepare your response, first consider why an interviewer asks this question. To begin with, it is usually an “ice-breaker”; the first question asked during the interview to break-the-ice and start the conversation going. *The interviewer is hoping to hear something of value to the organization as well as see that you communicate effectively and professionally.* You, as the interviewee, should take advantage of the opportunity to stress your strengths and why you’d fit with the organization. That’s a lot to do in 60 seconds or less and with just one question, so here are some things to consider when outlining your response.

You might:

- Provide basic information about yourself and your qualifications.
- Discuss your greatest and most relevant achievement.
- Tell them about a significant and relevant experience.
- Talk about your goals and interests.
- Emphasize your interest in the organization and why you want to work there.

Whatever you include, **make sure you tie it to the position and the organization.** Spend time analyzing the job description and the organization and find a way to tell your story so it’s clear to the interviewer why you’re interested in the job and what you bring to it.

**Bring enthusiasm and some passion to your response and PRACTICE!!!**

*Example response to “Tell me about yourself”:*

“Writing and public speaking have been a passion of mine since high school. When I entered college, I pursued a number of writing related experiences, including serving as the editor of Skid News, our college newspaper. That position gave me the opportunity to not only write pieces for the paper, but also manage a team and learn the business of producing a weekly paper. Over the past summer, I worked as a social media intern for Digital Mark 360, where I got involved in all areas of marketing, including social media, creative and events marketing and website management. This broader experience in communications made me realize that this was the direction I wanted to take in my career. Which brings me to this job. I’m excited about the opportunity to apply my strong writing and creative skills in a position which would have a strong impact on the products and services served.”

## **CORE COMPETENCIES EMPLOYERS SEEK:**

According to NACE (the National Association of Colleges and Employers), the following core competencies are valued most highly by employers when hiring new grads. Employers ask questions based on the skills most relevant to the job you’re interviewing for. **How will you demonstrate to employers that you have these skills?**

To help you prepare for behavior based, as well as, typical questions, use the chart below to identify and outline examples of your core competencies.

CORE COMPETENCY	HOW I DEMONSTRATE IT – gather examples from work, volunteer, projects, clubs, etc.
<p><b>Critical Thinking/Problem Solving -</b> Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. Obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.</p>	
<p><b>Team Work/Collaboration –</b> Build collaborative relationships, work within a team structure, and ability to negotiate and manage conflict.</p>	
<p><b>Professionalism/Work Ethic –</b> Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time management. Demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly and is able to learn from mistakes.</p>	
<p><b>Communication –</b> Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms. Proven public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively.</p>	
<p><b>Digital Literacy –</b> Utilize digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. Demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.</p>	
<p><b>Leadership –</b> Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. Ability to manage self- emotions and those of others; organize, prioritize, and delegate work.</p>	
<p><b>Career Management –</b> Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position and career goals, understands how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace.</p>	
<p><b>Global/Intercultural Fluency –</b> Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. Demonstrates, openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals' differences.</p>	

## **QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK:**

Either at the end of your interview, or perhaps during the interview, you will have the chance to ask questions that are important to you. Make sure you don't ask obvious questions that you could find answers to either on the website or job announcement. Prepare questions ahead of time and bring them to your interview. Below are some possible questions to ask:

- Could you tell me a bit more about the structure of this position? Who would I be reporting to and how is performance evaluated?
- What kind of training is provided to new employees?
- What's the policy on attending workshops, conferences and courses to acquire new skills?
- Can you describe a bit more about the work culture?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspects of this job?
- What do you like most about working for this organization?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this job?
- What is the timeframe for making a decision? What is the next step in the process?

## **AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW:**

1. **Thank you note:** within a day of your interview, send thank you notes to all who interviewed you. Your main purpose is to thank them for their time and to reiterate your interest in the position and/or organization. You might also reinforce a particular skill or experience you discussed in the interview. Keep it short!
2. **Follow-up:** Hopefully you discussed next steps and when you would hear from them before you left the interview. If you haven't heard from them by the date indicated, it's appropriate to follow up with a phone call. This will give you another chance to show your continued interest in the position and find out the status of the search.

**For more information on interviewing or to set up a mock interview for practice, meet with a member of the CDC!**