

INTERVIEW RESOURCE PACKET

CAS CAREER SERVICES



CAREER SERVICES
College of Arts and Sciences

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BASIC INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

One of the main reasons that individuals feel anxious interviewing is being unsure of what to expect. This packet aims to address this anxiety by defining the structure, setting, and purpose of interviews.

Opening. The beginning of an interview is all about first impressions and presenting your "professional brand." This portion of the interview typically includes a professional introduction, and a detailed account of your experiences and what brought you in to interview that day.

Information. Most job openings have specified "minimum qualifications" or desired traits for it's candidates. The information phase of the interview typically includes basic qualification-focused questions to ensure you can perform the job. These include trait-based and "biographical" questions.

Evaluation. After gaining basic information, many interviewers will shift their focus to evaluating your ability to perform the job function and evaluate your "performance" against the other interviewees. This section typically consists of example, situational, and case-study type questions to evaluate how you would handle varied situations related to the job.

Closing. The final phase of an interview is all about wrapping up, restating your 'brand' and asking strong questions.

IN-PERSON VS. VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

In-Person

- Dress the part! Be sure you are crafting a strong professional image and first impression.
- Be thoughtful about your body language and eye contact.
- Attempt to keep the energy up and the employer engaged.
- Avoid too many 'umms' 'likes' or other fillers.
- Bring something to write with & extra resumes.
- Turn off your phone and smart watch.
- Address the entire interview committee, not just the hiring manager.
- Speak clearly and confidently.
- Be sure to offer handshakes at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Be confident!

Virtual

- Avoid distracting or flashy backgrounds, plain walls with minimum decoration are best.
- Dress the same as you would for an in-person interview (from head to toe!)
- Test your interview set up *before* the interview, have a friend call you the day before to test your connection.
- If possible, find alternative contact info for the employer in case of internet outages.
- Ensure that audio/visual are clear and easy to see.
- Communicate eye contact by looking at the camera when speaking, and the screen when listening.
- Using a phone can be acceptable, but laptop or desktop are preferred.

INTERVIEW RESOURCES

Practice, practice, practice! Also, take advantage of up to 10 free pages of resume paper per day, 3 free thank you cards per day, and a \$5 professional portfolio at 360 Student Union.

- **HireOSUgrads.com:** This site includes a Resource Library where you can read through many helpful handouts before an interview. You can also watch videos offering tips for dress and other preparation videos through Candid Career.
- **Glassdoor.com:** This site has information about company salaries, reviews from employees and offers common interview questions for which you can become prepared.
- **Reserve an Interview Room:** Have a virtual interview but not a great space? Reserve a free interview room in 360 Student Union by going to <http://hireosugrads.com/StudentsAlumni/Appointment-InterviewRoom.aspx>

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

Be familiar with the company and position before you get to the interview. This should include the company's structure, products/services, job requirements, current events or things like the company's mission statement. See below for some specific tips and tricks.

- **Visit their website.** Most companies will have a website that contains a "careers" or "employment" section of some sort. Become familiar with it! Look for information about the company's philosophy, tag line, goals, mission statement, philanthropic activities, etc. Be prepared to incorporate some of this information with your answers to the below questions that may arise during an interview.
 - Why do you want to work for ____ company?
 - What attracted you to our company?
 - How do you believe you will fit into our organization?
- **Know the job description.** Be sure you know the specific job for which you're applying. This includes the title, qualifications, experience, and characteristics they are looking for in applicants.
- **Know the industry.** There are plenty of resources for getting to know various industries. This information might include public policy, labor statistics, salaries, required skills/education, etc. Use the below websites to learn more.
 - Glassdoor.com
 - Onetonline.com (Occupational Information Network – O*Net)
 - BLS.gov (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

RESEARCH YOURSELF

Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses

- Employer's look for candidates who know themselves! What are you good at? Where can you grow?
- Choose strengths that are easily identifiable. What experiences have you had to use your strengths? This could be work, class, or through personal experiences.
- *Frame weaknesses as areas of growth.* No employer expects a *perfect* candidate. Show the employer that you know your weaknesses, but more importantly show them what you're doing to **improve**.

Identify Your Value

- What makes you the *best* fit for this position? How will you improve that company/organization?
- Identify unique traits you offer and explicitly state them to the employer.
- Demonstrate your research by identifying where your value aligns with the job description.

What Does Your Experience Say About You?

- Show, don't tell! Employer's want to know how you've demonstrated your value and abilities.
- Whenever possible connect your value back to specific experiences or examples where you applied your skills, this will indicate how you will apply those skills for the employer .

Prep Your Stories

- A strong interviewer comes prepared with good stories and examples that showcase how you've been a valuable worker in the past.
- Brainstorm several stories that demonstrate things like; leadership, flexibility, time management, conflict resolution, maturity, work ethic, or ability to learn.
- We recommend using the STAR method to structure your story telling.

S - SITUATION T - TASK A - ACTION R - RESULT

"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, talking about your experiences, 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. 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..."

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. 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 competitors. Reflect on why this employer appeals to you versus other employers in the industry. Research the website and the company's mission statement and core values. Knowing this information will help you with 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 company that compares with yours. After reading your core values on the company website, I knew this company would be a great fit for me."

2. What qualifications do you have?

Name a few skills that relate to the position and provide brief examples of how you have demonstrated them through class projects, part-time jobs, leadership roles, internships, etc. For example, "Through my experience as a camp counselor, I developed strong leadership and teaching skills by leading activities for middle-school aged students. This will help me in this new role by..."

3. How do you believe you best fit in this organization?

This question is partially designed to see how much you know about the organization. Through prior research, you should know of services that are needed or areas where the employer is expanding. You can base your response on that information. 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 previous internship within the industry made me familiar with the Texas market, and it would be exciting to help you in that effort."

4. 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.

5. 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. Cite any contact you have had with employees, customers, or products that have given you a positive impression.

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

6. 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 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."

7. What are your weaknesses?

There are a variety of ways to handle this question. You may use something that could be viewed as both a positive and a negative trait. For example, "I tend to be someone who jumps into projects quickly. While I like to take on new challenges, I can have difficulty slowing down and planning projects through to completion." Remember each weakness should be followed with actions you are taking to overcome the weakness. You might also name a personal challenge which you have overcome. Be mindful to not name a weakness that is essential to the position, i.e., not liking people if you're applying for a sales position.

8. What kinds of people do you find difficult to get along with?

Be careful how you respond to such a personal question. While you may want to share this information with the interviewer, you need to keep the conversation positive and include how you deal positively with these types of people.

9. 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."

10. 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.

11. 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.

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

12. Do you work better 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 yourself: "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..."

13. 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."

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

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 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 toward 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."

15. 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. Common behavioral questions fall in the areas of teamwork, conflict resolution, or leadership. You may find it helpful to tell your story using the "STAR" format. Tell about a "Situation" or "Task". Explain the "Action" you took. Many people neglect to finish the story with the "Result". Explain a quantifiable result that was achieved and emphasize the role you played in the successful outcome.

16. 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.

17. What kind of salary are you looking for today?

You should know what a competitive salary is for the position, but do not offer a figure. Quoting a figure too low may get you an offer that is too low. A number that is higher than the employer has in mind may keep you from getting an offer. 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." If the interviewer persists, respond that your market research shows that salaries falls in the range of ___ to ___, but avoid setting an exact figure for yourself. You may choose to politely transform your answer into a question for the employer. "What range do you have in mind for the position?"

!CAUTION!

While the vast majority of employers innocently want to get to know a candidate, there are illegal questions employers should not ask according to Title VII and/or The American Disabilities Act. These questions include discriminatory topics like sex, age, race, national origin, religion, or disability when they do not pertain to job duties. Again, most employers genuinely want to get to know you and are not intentionally asking illegal questions. When responding, it's important to remain positive if you want to keep the door for the job open. After the interview, you can decide whether or not you want to accept any potential offers. You are under no obligation to answer illegal questions but can decide whether or not to answer if you do not believe the employer had discriminatory purposes in mind. To learn more about how to respond or take action if you feel you've been treated unethically, you can make an appointment with a career consultant or visit www.eeoc.gov.

"WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?"

You should have at least 4 to 5 prepared questions when you walk into your interview. However, you'll have to pay close attention when the employer is speaking because you should not ask questions that have already been answered in the interview process or could easily be found on the employer's website or at an information session. Write these questions down in your portfolio because you will inevitably forget them! You can also ask questions that arise during the interview about unclear points or specific information relevant to your discussions.

Typically, the employer will provide a space for you at the end of the interview by asking what questions you have for the company. This is your time to shine! The more specific your questions, the more memorable to the employer. While asking about the work atmosphere or trajectory of the position or company is good, asking more specific questions about the position or company based on the research you've done up front will set you apart. See below for some sample questions.

- **What makes this firm different from your competitors?**
- **What qualities would the ideal candidate for this position possess?**
- **How does this position interact with the rest of the organization?**
- **What education and training programs does the company provide?**
- **What do you enjoy most about working for this firm?**
- **What challenges might I face in this position?**
- **How did you get started in the company? What made you successful?**
- **How does this job contribute to the mission or goals of the company?**

CLOSING STATEMENTS

When the interview starts to wrap up, be sure to leave your interviewer knowing where you stand. If you are very interested in this opportunity, be sure to express that in a clear, enthusiastic yet professional manner. This means saying something like, "I have very much enjoyed learning more about your company and I am excited about continuing the application process." You also need to be sure to get clear information on how to move forward. Ask questions about the next steps in the application process, the time line in which they are hoping to fill position, and any other questions you may have about the process.

FOLLOWING UP

According to employers one of the most common mistakes interviewees make is waiting too long to follow up with a hiring manager or **not following up at all**.

A good practice is to follow up with an employer by using a simple follow up email or handwritten thank you note. We suggest following up with the interviewer within **8-24 hours** following your interview.

What should my thank you message include?

- **Who you are.**
- **What were your take-aways from your interview?**
- **How the employer can contact you.**
- **State directly, but firmly that you are excited to move forward with the process**

An email addressed to the entire interview committee is acceptable, but individualized emails are a great way to include an added personal touch. **Learn more using our Thank You Email & Thank You Card Packet**



The image shows a stylized email composition window with an orange header bar containing three window control icons (square, circle, triangle). Below the header, there is a 'Send' button on the left and two input fields for 'To:' and 'Subject:'. The 'To:' field contains 'recruiter@company.com' and the 'Subject:' field contains 'Thank you for the interview'. Below the input fields, the email body text is displayed, starting with 'Dear Rex Recruiter,' followed by a paragraph of text, a signature, and contact information.

Send

To: recruiter@company.com

Subject: Thank you for the interview

Dear Rex Recruiter,

I wanted to reach out to you to let you know I had a great experience during my on-campus interview with you yesterday. As I learned more about your company it was easy to see how my career goals align with opportunities working in pharmaceuticals. I am very interested in working with your company after graduation so I can start putting my chemistry and laboratory skills to work. My background working with unique compounds and my interest in exploring medical applications for new formulas will be a great fit for my interests and education. Thank you again for your time during my interview and I hope I have made just as strong of an impression with you as you did on me.

Sincerely,
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