Interviewing E-GUIDE

IN THIS SECTION

- Overview
- Types of Interviews
  - Screening vs. Decision Interviews
  - Phone Interviews
  - Skype/Webcam Interviews
  - Panel Interviews
  - Group Interviews
  - Meal Interviews
- Interview Question Types & Examples
  - Personal Questions
  - Employer Information Questions
  - Education Questions
  - Experience Questions
  - Case/Technical Questions
  - Atypical Questions
  - Behavioral Interviewing
  - Questions to Ask the Interviewer
- Inappropriate Interview Questions & Discrimination
- Preparing for the Interview
- What to do the Day of the Interview
- After the Interview
- Interview Anxiety
- Additional Resources at the Center for Career Services

OVERVIEW
An interview is a meeting (can be in-person, by phone, or internet video-chat) between a candidate and an employer performed to help both parties determine whether or not an opportunity is a good fit for the candidate. Interviews give individuals an opportunity for both the candidate and the employer to share information and decide whether they are right for each other.

Before walking into the interview room for that dream job, it is essential to recognize that interviewing, like playing basketball or composing music, is a skill that requires time and careful preparation to cultivate. If you are going to convince the recruiter or hiring manager that you are the right person for the job, you will need to be an expert in articulating your personal brand, value, and relevance to the employer as well as be an expert on the job and the company to which you are applying. Even more, you will need to know how to communicate the things you want to highlight about yourself in a clear and concise manner and be prepared for a wide variety of potential questions.

While this process might seem overwhelming and daunting – do not fret! The Center for Career Services offers a wide variety of resources, programs, and services to assist students in gaining confidence and building skills for their job or internship interviews. More importantly, now you have this comprehensive guide which will provide you with a detailed overview of all you need to know about the interviewing process!
TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are two primary types of job interviews: screening interviews and decision interviews. Screening interviews are usually conducted by recruiters or other human resources professionals rather than actual hiring managers. The purpose of this type of interview is to get a quick read on a candidate’s ability to perform in a job. These interviews are typically short (15-30 minutes max) and the questions are focused on verifying relevant facts and qualifications about a candidate in order to answer the query: Are you actually a viable contender for this position? Examples of screening interviews include many telephone interviews, career fair conversations, and on-campus interviews.

Decision interviews are usually conducted by a hiring manager or the person with the authority to make a hiring decision. The goal of these interviews is to answer the question: Compared to the other individuals we have considered, are you the best candidate for the job? The employer’s goal in these kinds of interviews is to determine if you are fully qualified for the position and how well you, your personality, work style, and work values will fit into the broader organization.

A third kind of interview type is the informational interview – an interview that YOU initiate with a current professional in order to gain a first-hand perspective of what it is really like to work in a specific job, field or industry that you have been considering for your career. Informational interviewing is an essential part of the networking process and a great way to more meaningfully inform the job and internship search. For a full description on informational interviewing see the Networking & Personal Branding E-Guide.

A key element to successful interviewing is positively presenting yourself to demonstrate how your qualifications meet the employer’s needs. As a result, depending on the format of your interview, how you prepare and the way you choose to present yourself makes a difference. Below is a practical overview of the main interviewing formats as well as tips for maximizing your chances for success in each setting.

Interview Formats

Phone Interviews

Many employers will conduct phone interviews prior to in-person interviews; if you are conducting a long-distance job search, you may also be more likely to experience phone interviews. Here are some tips when participating in a phone interview:

- **Prepare for your phone interview just as you would prepare for an in-person interview.** A phone interview is just as important as any other interview. This is the employer's first impression of you.
- **Sit in a chair at a desk for your phone interview.** You do not have to dress professionally, but do not get too relaxed. Your environment and the way you dress and sit will set a professional tone for the interview.
- **Make sure you have copies of all paperwork:** resume, application, cover letter, previous correspondence, company literature, and your list of questions to ask.
- **Notify your roommates or anyone else who shares your living space of your phone interview so that they will allow you to answer the phone.**
- **Be sure to find a quiet place to conduct the interview where distractions will be limited.** If you are conducting the interview at home, ask your roommates/housemates to remain respectful and quiet during the interview.
- **Pay attention to tone and vocal production.** Typically, only one part of our communication is verbal. Body language usually accounts for a large part of what we communicate. During a phone interview, body language is taken out of the equation. Verbal communication and tone of voice is, therefore, very important during a phone interview.
- **Write down each interviewer’s name as they introduce themselves so you can write them a thank you note afterwards.**
- **Listen very carefully.** Because body language is not playing a part, your verbal communication skills, both speaking and listening, are very important during a phone interview.
• **Ask for clarification or for the interviewer to repeat a question, if necessary.** Let them know if you are having trouble hearing or understanding, which can occur with a bad connection or during teleconferencing.

• **Smile when appropriate.** It will come through in your voice. Watch those nervous giggles, though; they will give an impression of immaturity and lack of self-confidence.

• **Give succinct, articulate responses.** Speak clearly and at an appropriate rate so that you will be understood. Be extra careful of using filler words like, "umm," "like," and "you know." Again, your verbal communication is the only method of communication available to you during a phone interview.

• **Do not talk too much.** It can be easy to get carried away since you do not have the non-verbal feedback of your interviewers to let you know when it is time to wrap up.

• **Do not be afraid of silence or pauses,** which may seem exaggerated when you are on the phone.

• **Be prepared to receive the interview phone call (do not be on another call at your interview time!) and make sure your voicemail message is professional** and clearly states your full name in case a call does not go through.

• **Keep the main objective of securing a face-to-face interview in mind and do not ask questions about money, benefits, etc.** There will be time for that later.

**Skype/Webcam Interview**

This particular format of interviewing is starting to become very common as a result of convenience; do not be surprised if an employer chooses to skip the telephone interview in favor of interviewing you via webcam. Here are some tips for conducting a Skype/Webcam interview:

• **Know your technology** - whatever type of webcam application you choose, make sure you know how to use it well before the day of the interview. Check the speaker and microphone volume and settings, check the picture quality, know how to use the screen sharing functions, and know how to set up a multi-person web conference.

• **Control your environment.** Eliminate distractions such as roommates, pets, boyfriends/girlfriends, and parents; shut down all social media and music applications to ensure that you stay focused throughout the interview; make sure you and your surrounding environment are appropriate and visually clear by taking a look at yourself in the webcam.

• **Be ready to go 10-15 minutes beforehand and budget extra time in case the interview lasts longer than anticipated.** Have a glass of water nearby and have all of your notes ready to reference, like you would in a phone interview.

• **Do not get up and move during the interview.** The interviewer can see you and everything you do.

• **Signal strength is particularly important when you are transmitting video,** so **make sure you have a fast and reliable internet connection.** Test your connection speed and/or wireless signal strength to be certain it can effectively handle webcam communication.

• **Be ready with a Plan B just in case technology falls through.** Make sure you know your interviewer’s phone number and email address so you can contact them immediately if something is not working on your side.

**Panel Interview**

In this format, a candidate will be interviewed by multiple interviewers (typically 2-4), who have a list of pre-determined questions that they will ask you in a round-robin format.

• **Contact the employer in advance to find out how many interviewers will be on the panel, as well as the identity of these individuals** so that you can target your research to your interviewers and plan responses. Sometimes employers will provide you with this information when they set up the interview.

• **Think of the panel as several individuals coming together with the common goal of hiring the best candidate for the job, not as a single entity.** **Each person attending the interview probably has their own agenda or department’s interest at heart, so make sure to attend to these details as you prepare your answers.**
• **Provide equal eye contact to all interviewers**, regardless of their locations in the room and their levels of seniority in the company.

• **Make sure you have prepared a list of appropriate and thoughtful questions to ask the interviewers.** Despite the fact that panel interviews are loaded in the company's favor, most firms will allow you a few minutes to ask questions of your own.

• **Prepare responses to commonly asked questions.** Always have a response ready for the "Tell us about yourself" question that often starts things off in the panel interview. Have both a short version and a long version, and ask the panel members how much detail they want.

• **Send a personalized thank you to each panel member.** Refer to each person's area of interest and customize your comments to make them relevant to that person's particular role.

**Group Interview**
A group interview brings together multiple candidates for a specific position to be interviewed at the same time.

• **Be sure to act courteously to the other interviewees**, thoughtfully listen to their responses and, if possible, integrate their thoughts into your unique responses.

• Since one of the purposes of this unusual format is to see how candidates interact with each other, this can be an opportunity to be gracious to your “competition” and to **demonstrate your ability to be an effective team player**.

• If your interviewer provides the name of the other candidates you will be interviewing with, **check their LinkedIn profiles** so you can get insight into their background and develop ways to distinguish yourself from the competition.

• **Have a mini-introduction of yourself ready.** Most of the time in group interviews, the employer will break the ice by having everyone tell a little bit about themselves. What you say is important and determines how you stick out from the rest of the candidates.

• **Nod your head every so often when the employer speaks.** Employers want to know that you are a good listener and can take in information quickly. A simple head nod sends a non-verbal signal to the employer that you are actively attending to what they are saying.

• **Be the first to speak a few times.** This behavior demonstrates leadership ability and initiative. After the manager asks a question, do not be afraid to speak up first and give your best response. However, be aware of looking too aggressive and over-speaking. Employers can tell if you are trying too hard or trying to bully other candidates which may reflect poorly on your character.

• **Do not interrupt another job candidate while they speak.** Remember, the employer is taking your behavioral demonstration in the interview as an indicator of how you will perform on the job. Be respectful of others!

• **Ask questions in the end.** Like with any other interview, you are responsible for preparing your own questions. Show interest and ask a relevant inquiry to make yourself stand out.

**Meal Interview**
In this type of interview the employer is gauging both your emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. The conversation during a meal interview may have less to do with the job and may focus more on general topics including news, culture and shared interests.

• **Research the restaurant location in advance and check out the menu online.** Select an option that is easy to eat, not overly potent in odor, and not the most expensive thing on the menu. Choose food that can be eaten easily with a fork. Pass on sandwiches, pasta, and messy dishes and do not order multiple courses unless instructed to do so by the employer.

• **Order non-alcoholic drinks.** Even if others are consuming alcohol in an interview, it is wise to keep your wits about you so that you make strong choices. It is a meal, but it is still an interview and the employer is
watching. An easy way to get out of pressure situations involving alcohol is to state simply, “Thank you, but I want to be 100% present for this interview. I will have a (non-alcoholic drink choice) instead.”

- **Beware the over-friendly interviewer:** “Companies will often send you to a lunch interview with a ‘friendly’ employee -- someone around your age, with a similar background, who adopts a relaxed approach that may prompt you to let your guard down,” says Jodi Smith, president of Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting. “While you certainly can interact less formally, be extra wary of what you say.”

- **Turn off and do not check your phone,** even if the interviewer is checking their device frequently.

- **Do not rush to immediately start selling yourself;** let the hiring manager lead the conversation and avoid talking too much to fill a long pause.

- **Avoid appearing picky;** aside from a death-inducing food allergy, order what is on the menu.

- **Mind your manners! Do not be rude to wait staff or show up late.** According to a survey of advertising and marketing executives by The Creative Group, half of the respondents said being impolite to a restaurant’s wait staff is the single biggest blunder a professional can make during a lunch meeting. Showing up late ranked second.

**INTERVIEW QUESTION TYPES AND EXAMPLES**

Listed below are some common interview questions organized by section with tips for answering them. As you prepare for your interview, it is not necessary to memorize answers; rather, practice talking about yourself, your skills, and your experiences so that you are prepared to answer a variety of questions.

**Personal Questions:** These questions target your interests, qualities, goals, strengths and weaknesses. Tips for answering:

- **Whenever discussing weaknesses or failures, be honest and give examples of real weaknesses.** After sharing the weakness, make sure to focus on how you are currently working to compensate for or improve those weaknesses, and what you have learned from your failures.

- **When telling an employer about yourself, focus on relevant information.** Think about your qualities, experiences, skills, and achievements that will be important to the employer.

Examples:

1. Tell me a little about yourself. (Keep your answer career oriented.)
2. Why do you feel you are qualified for this job?
3. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
4. What do you hope to gain from this position?
5. What can you offer this company that someone else can not?
6. What causes you stress and how do you handle it?
7. Give me three adjectives that describe you.
8. What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?
9. Who is your role model and why?
10. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
11. To whom have you served as a role model and why?
12. Why are you interested in this position?
13. Where do you see yourself in five years?
14. How do you define success? How do you define leadership?
15. What criteria are you using to evaluate potential employers and jobs?

**Employer Information:** These questions are about your knowledge of the employer and your interest in the organization. Tips for answering:

- Do your research about the employer and the position beforehand!
- Determine some company initiatives/goals to which you can specifically contribute given your experience so you can reference them explicitly in the interview.
Examples:
1. What do you know about our company/organization?
2. What do you know about this position?
3. Why do you want to work in this field and for our company?
4. What are the most important features you are looking for in a job/supervisor?
5. What type of steps do you take to stay informed of new developments within your career field?
6. What can you contribute to our organization?
7. Who are our competitors? Who are our partners?
8. What major trends do you expect to influence this industry in the next 5 to 10 years?

Education Related: These questions focus on your classes and campus involvement. Tips for answering:
- Do you have a withdrawal or failing grade on your transcript? If so, be prepared to explain those. Take responsibility for your grades. Focus on what you learned from the situation and discuss how you have improved your study skills and ability to prioritize.
- Be prepared to elaborate on anything on your resume. Do not include a student organization on your resume if you did not have meaningful participation in the organization.

Examples:
1. How did you decide on your career/field/major?
2. What classes have you enjoyed the most/least during college and why?
3. How have the activities that you have been involved with during college influenced you?
4. Do you have future plans of furthering your education?
5. What campus activities were you involved with?
6. Explain... (a poor grade or another failure).
7. Are your grades an accurate reflection of your academic abilities?
8. How did you prioritize your time as a student?
9. Which electives did you take and why did you choose to take them?
10. What did you learn from your internship?

Experience: These questions allow you to discuss your work experience, volunteer and community service experiences, leadership roles, student organization involvement, or any other experience that is relevant to the position. Tips for answering:
- Use specific examples to support your answers.
- Avoid talking negatively about previous employers or supervisors.
- Think broadly about your experience. Classroom experiences provide you with relevant skills and can provide some great examples that will support your answers.

Examples:
1. Tell me about a time when you had to influence someone to accept your idea.
2. Give me an example of a time when you had to make an important decision and how you came to that decision.
3. What type of supervision do you prefer?
4. What is your personal style of supervision?
5. Give me an example of a time you worked successfully with a team. What role did you have?
6. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person and how you handled it.
7. Tell me about your position with__________ and the valuable skills you learned.
8. Please give me an example where you demonstrated the ability to be an effective member of a team.
9. Give me 3 reasons why I should hire you as a result of your experiences.
10. How would your co-workers/supervisors describe you?
11. What did you like the most and the least about your last place of employment?
12. What relevant experience do you have?

Case/Technical Questions: These questions usually involve a business scenario or logic problem, to which you are asked to respond. There may even be role-playing involved, with the interviewer role-playing the client.
Tips for answering:
- If you do not know the answer, demonstrate your resourcefulness. What resources would you use to solve the problem? How would you find the answer?
- Ask for a moment to gather your thoughts before you answer.
- Ask questions. Business case studies should be interactive discussions.
- Your thought process is more important than the end result so talk them through your approach to solving the problem.

Examples:
1. Could you tell us about what steps you would take to develop a plan of service to meet the client’s social, health, emotional and economic need? (for a counseling or social work position)
2. How would you redesign an ATM machine to make it more user-friendly?
3. A restaurant owner is setting up a new restaurant and is making a decision on the facilities to place in the restrooms for customers to dry their hands. Initial research suggests that she has three options – paper towels, roller towels, and hot air dryers. She needs to decide today. What should she consider in her decision making process?
4. You have a three liter bucket and a five liter bucket. How will you measure out exactly 4 liters of water? Assume you have an endless supply of water and no markings on the buckets. (this is a logic problem)
5. Estimate the market for light bulbs in Australia. (focus on the process, not the result)

Atypical Interview Questions: Employers occasionally add unusual questions to see how well interviewees are prepared to think on their feet. Tips for answering:
- Do not spend too much time preparing answers to these questions as they are not very common and hard to predict – Just be flexible if you get one and do not act surprised!
- This is your chance to be creative and show your (professional and appropriate) sense of humor.

Examples
1. If you were a fork, a knife, or a spoon, which would you be and why?
2. Why are manhole covers round?
3. Sell me something in this room, anything.
4. If you were a tree, what kind would you be and why?
5. If the tables were turned, how would you interview me?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING
Behavioral interviewing is a technique used by employers to learn about your past behavior in particular situations, as past performance is the best predictor of future behavior. Behavioral interview questions ask you to provide an example of a time you were in a particular situation or encountered a specific challenge and often start with, “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of...” Behavioral interview questions are to be expected in any interviewing situation and can be asked within any of the above topic areas. Tips for answering:
- Tell the interviewer about a particular situation rather than providing a general response.
- Keep your answer succinct and focused while providing enough relevant detail – use the STAR technique (described below) to help organize your response.
- Practice answering these types of questions in advance so that your memory is refreshed regarding your experience and achievements.
- Consider selecting a few life experiences that you feel might be relevant in demonstrating a couple of different qualities/behaviors so that you have these stories easily accessible to bring forward to demonstrate the desired quality/behavior (for example, a time when you worked with some of your peers on a group project in class could be a relevant story to demonstrate teamwork, leadership, overcoming a struggle, etc.)

The STAR-F Technique
To effectively and completely answer behavioral interviewing questions, use the STAR technique.
S – Describe the Situation
T – Describe the Task you had to overcome and your Thinking process
A – Describe the Action you took (not the action the group took if describing a group interaction)
R – Describe the Result of your action (i.e.: what happened? if negative, what did you learn from this experience?)
F- How did you feel as a result of this experience? Employers want to know your motivations as they will indicate how you will behave in the future. Someone who feels great about doing something positive will continue to do positive things. Someone who feel bad about making a mistake will try hard not to make the same mistake in the future—employers value this! It is the indifferent/unfeeling person that raises a red flag for an employer.

Common Behavioral Interview Questions
Use the list of common behavioral interview questions below to brainstorm examples and practice answering questions:
• Give me an example of a time when you used creativity to complete a project, work with someone else, or develop a new idea.
• Describe a time when you were a team leader. Who did the team consist of, and what did you do to help your team be successful?
• Describe a time when you were assigned a task but were provided little direction for how to complete the task. What steps did you take to complete the task? What was the outcome?
• Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker or fellow student on a project. How did you handle the situation? What were the outcomes?
• Tell me about a time when you had to persuade someone to see your point of view. What tactics did you use? What were the outcomes? What did you learn?
• Tell me about a time you were involved in a project with a group.
• Give me an example of a time when you had to supervise someone.
• Tell me about how you keep yourself organized to meet deadlines or goals.
• Give me an example of a time where you failed to meet a goal. What did you fail to do? What were the consequences? What was the outcome?
• Describe a time when a co-worker or student approached you and criticized your work. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
• Provide me with an example of a time when you had to motivate others. What were the outcomes?
• Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision that affected those with whom you worked. What was the outcome?

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER
ALWAYS be prepared to ask questions at the end of your interview. Asking questions shows genuine interest and enthusiasm for the job and the company to which you are applying. This is also your opportunity to “interview” the interviewers so as to determine your own fit for the position and the company.

Research the company ahead of time to develop some ideas for questions. Avoid asking questions that are answered on the company’s website or in company literature; your questions should demonstrate that you have prepared for the interview and done your research.

Plan to ask three or four questions, but prepare about ten questions since some of your questions may be answered during the interview. Be respectful of the interviewer’s time by asking a few thoughtful questions, rather than many superficial questions. Wait to ask your questions until the end of the interview, or until asked by the interview if you have any questions. Remember to let the interviewer run the interview.
Good Topics to Ask Questions About:

- Culture/philosophy of the company
- Training and learning environment
- Technology used by the company
- Leadership development
- Communication within the company
- Mentor programs
- Social, work/life balance
- Vision or future growth of the company

Sample Questions to Ask:

1. How would you describe the culture of the organization?
2. What do you like best about the company/organization environment?
3. What qualities do people seem to have who have done well in this department/organization?
4. What opportunities exist for advancement?
5. What is a typical day like in this position?
6. Is there anything else I should know that would help me understand the position?
7. Why is this position available?
8. How many people have held this position in the last three years? (If it seems like there has been high turnover, ask for an explanation.)
9. Do you most often promote internally or externally?
10. Does this organization encourage personal and professional growth? How?
11. What are the opportunities you see for this department/organization in the next year?
12. What are the typical hours of this position? Will overtime, night or weekend work be required?
13. What new tasks or responsibilities do you see someone in this position taking on?
14. What are the challenges that need to be faced? What types of challenges does this particular position offer?
15. What type of supervision would I receive in this position?
16. How did you start with the company/organization?
17. What do you like about working for this organization? How would you compare it to others you have worked for?
18. What are the greatest strengths of this company?
19. What would you change about this organization if you could?
20. How well do departments interact with each other?
21. Will the company continue to be competitive? How?
22. Is your organization quick or slow to adopt new technology?
23. What type of growth do you foresee in the next few years? Why?
24. Where in the company do you hope to be in five years? (A good way to sense potential growth.)

INAPPROPRIATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND DISCRIMINATION

There is a lot of confusion in the world of work about illegal interview questioning. Technically, there is no language in Federal law that makes any kind of question illegal in and of itself. However, Federal laws prohibit prospective employers from making hiring decisions based on information that is unrelated to the job which may constitute discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That being said, reputable employers should be asking questions that are job-related and not used to find out personal information. Questions related to the following topics are generally considered inappropriate and should not be asked about during an interview:

- Age
- Disability
- National origin
- Family/Children
- Race
- Gender
- Religion or creed
- Relationship issues/Marital Status

Response Options

Most interviewers are aware of inappropriate topics so, hopefully, you will not encounter any of these questions. If you are asked questions about any of these topics, it is probably because the interviewer has not been appropriately trained to know that these are inappropriate questions. Here are your options for responding:
• **Option 1:** Refuse to answer or ask for the relevance of the question. The risk of refusing to answer is the possibility of embarrassing the interviewer and negatively impacting your candidacy.

• **Option 2:** Answer the question. The decision to answer the question is a personal one. Consider your comfort level with the question, as well as the implications of answering the question.

• **Option 3:** Answer the “intent” or the “real” question behind the question. This is not always easy to identify. For example, if an employer asks if you plan to have children soon, perhaps they are trying to assess your commitment to your career by determining what other responsibilities you have. Rather than responding to the direct question, you could assure the interviewer that you prioritize your career and have been successful at balancing your career with your other responsibilities. Here is another example: if you are an international candidate and get asked whether you are a United States citizen (which is NOT legal to ask), reply that you are authorized to work in the U.S., which is a question the employer can ask you and which is appropriate to answer.

• **Option 4:** Sometimes it is possible to answer with humor or to simply deflect the question, if you are good at thinking on your feet. For example, if any employer asks if you have any health problems, you could answer with something like, “Yes – I’m a workaholic.”

**Important Considerations**

After such an experience, ask yourself what the question tells you about the workplace. Did the motivation behind the question just seem like a genuine effort to get to know you better? Did the question make you uncomfortable enough to cause you to question the values and culture of the company? If so, this is valuable information as you make your own assessment of the fit of the position.

**If You Feel You Have Encountered Discrimination**

If you believe you have been discriminated against, before you file a claim for discrimination, keep in mind that most discrimination is not intentional. In many cases, the interviewer may simply be ignorant of the law. Even though the interviewer may have asked an inappropriate question, it does not necessarily mean that the intent was to discriminate or that a crime has been committed. If you believe the discrimination was intentional and that you have been discriminated against by an employer, labor union or employment agency when applying for a job or while on the job because of your race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, or disability, or believe that you have been discriminated against because of opposing a prohibited practice or participating in an equal employment opportunity matter, you may file a charge of discrimination with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

**PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

**Reflection, Research, & Practice**

In order to best prepare for an interview, dedicate some time to the following activities:

**Self-Reflection**

Confidently articulating exactly how your skills and experiences match the organization’s needs and position requirements is the central goal of the interview. Taking the time to really think about what you have to offer (or developing your “Personal Brand”) can really help you tailor and articulate your answers. Be ready to further highlight the value of the experiences you listed on your resume by clarifying transferable skills and knowledge you have developed through those experiences. Here are some ways to help guide your pre-interview reflection:

- Identify a series of genuine strengths, weaknesses, values and goals as they relate to the position for which you are applying. Get feedback from a Career Coach about how to effectively express these details so as to impress the employer (especially your weaknesses!)
- Read through common interview questions and think about how you would answer them.
- Since many employers will expect you to clarify an interview question with a specific example from your life, reflect on a few different experiences that you believe were especially important in shaping you as an individual and as a professional that you can use to tangibly demonstrate a specific personal quality or behavior...
• Set up a mock interview with a Career Coach to sharpen your skills and learn of potential questions you may get asked in your field.

Research
Doing thorough research about the position, organization, and industry associated with the opportunity you are interviewing for demonstrates how interested you really are in a specific position or organization. Communicating this to an employer is just as important as communicating your ability to perform the job! Here are some tips for researching:

• Know the position description like the back of your hand. Be prepared to talk about your interest in the position and specifically how you are qualified to meet (and exceed) the listed expectations of the job.
• Review the organization’s corporate literature and extensively explore their website, especially those pages that refer to the organization’s mission and goals, as explicitly identifying how your skills and experience will benefit the future of both the specific office and the overall company for which you are interviewing is essential to your interview success.
• Be prepared to identify specific reasons as to why you want to work for this particular organization as opposed to another organization that does the same type of work and how you as a professional are a good fit for their company culture.
• Expand your position/company research process and impress employers by reading up on current industry trends, events and/or legislation that might impact your future field, employer, and/or position. This can be done quite easily by visiting the sites of professional organizations in your field and will demonstrate your active professional engagement and awareness.
• If you know with whom you will be interviewing, research the professional background of these individuals and be familiar with their title and how you might work with them if hired for the job. Finding a way to include something you know about the interviewer into your interview answers or conversation is just another way to impress an employer.

Practice
The most important part of preparing for an interview is practice! It is not enough to practice answers in your head; to ace an interview you MUST practice out loud and preferably with another person. While many people practice for an interview by writing down or rehearsing answers to common interview questions in front of the mirror or with friends (both strong ways to practice), to truly ensure your interview success, it would be wise to set up a practice interview with a Career Coach to get professional feedback on your interview style, presentation, and body language well in advance of an upcoming interview. Solidify your interview preparedness and truly internalize how your background and interests connect to the position/employer by practicing the articulation of this connection. While you cannot predict every question that will come your way in an interview, during a practice interview you will receive a thorough overview of what to expect, personalized strategies on how to navigate a wide variety of questions and scenarios, and tips on how to effectively articulate the answers to tough questions so you can walk into an interview confidently.

PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE
Your professional appearance is an important part of the first impression you will make on the interviewer. Being appropriately dressed demonstrates that you are professional and well prepared to transition from an academic to a business environment. If you come to an interview dressed professionally, you will feel a sense of confidence and others will sense your self-assurance.

Each industry has its own dress code. Fields such as law, banking and accounting frequently have a stricter set of guidelines than advertising, retail and sales, which allow more casual dress. Even though suggested guidelines of professional dress may seem more formal than you would have imagined, remember that you should dress more
formally for the interview than you would dress once you are in the job. Expect to be more formally dressed even than your interviewer. The level of formality you project shows that you understand the importance of the situation and respect the person you are meeting. When in doubt, making a conservative clothing choice for your interview is usually the safest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Conservative, dark suit (knee length skirt or pants).</td>
<td>• Conservative, dark suit (navy, black or gray; pinstripe or solid).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid low riding pants and tight clothing.</td>
<td>• Ironed shirt in a conservative color (white or blue) and tie with understated patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collared, button-down shirt or modest scoop neck top.</td>
<td>• Matching belt and shoes, dark socks to mid-calf.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid camisoles or low cut tops.</td>
<td>• Conservative, lace-up dress shoes that are clean and polished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comfortable shoes – flats or low heel.</td>
<td>• Haircut, shaven, well groomed, remove jewelry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wear plain, non-patterned hosiery if wearing a skirt.</td>
<td>• Avoid aftershave or cologne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bring extra hose if wearing a skirt.</td>
<td>• Can bring a padfolio and a small purse/briefcase/laptop bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservative makeup and nails (clear nail polish only).</td>
<td>• Can bring a padfolio and briefcase/laptop bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minimal jewelry (avoid dangling or large earrings; studs are best).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid perfume or scented lotion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can bring a padfolio and a small purse/briefcase/laptop bag.</td>
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</table>

**WHAT TO DO THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

**Basic Day-of Logistics**

Follow these guidelines to make sure you have everything under control on interview day!

- **Before the interview, review your resume, cover letter, and any correspondence with the employer.** If you know who you will be interviewing, review their title and read through their professional bio once more.
- **Know directions and parking and build in time for traffic.** If possible, do a dry run beforehand to make sure you know how long it will take you and where you are going.
- **Get enough sleep the night before, eat breakfast and avoid doing anything out of your normal morning routine**, such as drinking coffee if you are not a coffee drinker.
- **Arrive 10-15 minutes early.** This will allow you to gain your composure and to observe working conditions and company culture prior to your interview. If you arrive any earlier, hang out in your car or in a nearby shop to avoid showing up too early and causing an inconvenience.
- **If you are running late, call the person with whom you have the interview, briefly explain your reason for being late, and offer to reschedule.** Do not wait until the last minute to make that call!
- **Bring professional padfolio and pen, copies of your resume, and references.** It may also be beneficial to bring a portfolio with samples of your work.
- **Turn off your cell phone or leave it behind.** If you forget to turn off your cell phone, do not answer a call or text message during your interview. If your phone rings, turn it off and apologize.
- **Leave bags behind or carry a professionally appropriate purse/briefcase if necessary.**
- **Make sure to ask for the business cards of all those involved in the interview.**
- **During or shortly after the interview, take a few short notes on specific topics discussed during the interview and make sure to identify at least one specific thing mentioned by each interviewer (if there is more than one), as this will be helpful for follow up and thank you emails/letters.**
Making a Strong First Impression

The employer’s first impression of you is strongly influenced by your non-verbal behavior, verbal behavior, and overall attitude. Think of the interview as starting as soon as you leave your house; be friendly and professional to all those you interact with before you reach the interview site. It will help with your attitude and, even more important, you never know whom you might run into! Here are some tips for making a strong first impression:

- **Be courteous to the front desk staff or receptionist who greets you at the organization.** These individuals are key players in any organization and a negative interaction with them could easily result in your being passed over for the position no matter how well you interview!

- **Think positively!** You got the interview because the employer thinks that you will be a good fit for the position. If YOU do not believe that you are the best candidate for the job, the employer will pick up on this and you will not get hired! Stay positive and confident and “own” what you have done and what you know!

- **When the employer greets you, smile and make eye contact. Offer a firm handshake, web-to-web with one pump.** Avoid these four unfortunate styles of handshakes – the limp, dead fish handshake; the bone crusher; the vigorous shaker; and the pincher.

- **Use people’s names.** It creates rapport, as well as helping you to remember their names. Always use titles (Ms., Mr., Dr.) until invited to use first names. Err on the side of being too formal, rather than too casual. Use “Ms.” for women (instead of Miss or Mrs.), unless asked to address them otherwise.

- **When telling your story and answering questions, make sure to use active verbs and give concise, concrete, and complete examples** (Refer to the S.T.A.R. technique in the Behavioral Interviewing section)

- **93% of communication is non-verbal.** Your general appearance, facial expressions, and tone of voice sell your attributes. **Build a strong non-verbal connection in the following manner:**
  - Your eye contact should be open and direct when listening, asking, and responding to questions.
  - Your posture should be well-balanced, upright, relaxed, forward-facing, and open. Know your nervous habits and practice controlling them. Be sure to lean forward slightly to communicate interest.
  - Your hands should be used in a relaxed way for communicating excitement and interest.
  - A smile conveys your sincerity and can add a positive spin to your words.
  - The tone of your voice should be firm, warm, well-modulated and relaxed.
  - Do not hesitate to pause slightly before answering a question to gather your thoughts if you need to - this reflects poise to the interviewer and shows you are taking the interview and the quality of your responses seriously.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

**Thank the Interviewer**

Reaching out with both an email and a hand-written or hard-copy typed thank you letter after an interview is an expected courtesy, but many applicants fail to send them. Do not make this mistake! Sending a thank you email and letter will make a positive impression on the employer. In addition, the thank you provides you with another opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position and highlight any additional information you might have forgotten to ask. For information regarding thank you correspondence, visit our [Cover Letter Writing and Professional Correspondence E-Guide](#).

**The Thank You Email vs. the Thank You Letter Debate — Do BOTH!**

Thank you letters can be hard-copy typed, handwritten or emailed. Hard-copy, not-handwritten letters are most formal and are appropriate to send after an interview. Handwritten letters are more personal, and can be appropriate for brief notes to a variety of individuals you may have met during an on-site interview. Email is appropriate, particularly as a supplement (i.e. do both email and hard-copy) when that has been your means of contact with the person you want to thank, or if your contact has expressed a preference for email, or you know your contact is travelling and will not have access to hard-copy mail in a timely fashion.
Why sending a Thank You Email AND a Thank You Letter is the most PROFESSIONAL option:

- The thank you email can be sent out immediately to communicate your genuine excitement about the position while you are still fresh in the interviewer’s mind; the eventual arrival of the thank you letter reinforces that point by showing an exceptional degree of professionalism and a more personal touch to the interview process.
- If you send an email AND a letter, you increase your chances of reaching your interviewer in case one form of contact does not make it to them (email in the spam box or a letter getting lost in the mail) – if both make it with no problem, the stronger the impact!
- By sending an email an addition to a letter, if the interviewer ever searches for your name in their email, the note will pop up and remind them that you followed up and really want the job. In addition, by sending an email thank you right after the interview, the interviewer might write back to you, since the email will be open on their computer, and there is a bigger chance they will respond, or ask you a follow-up question, or continue the conversation.
- While a thank you email allows you to easily tailor it to the vibe of the interview that you are feeling the day of (i.e., it can be as casual or as formal as you decide), the handwritten note adds an additional degree of professionalism and personalization by being more unique in nature.
- If the employer is making a quick hiring decision and time is of the essence, reaching out to them within 24 to 28 hours by email and then following up with a formal letter will provide the interviewer record of your interest in the position sooner rather than later, while also having evidence of a personal touch.

HANDLING INTERVIEW ANXIETY

Anxiety related to the job search process in general, and to the interview process in particular, is to be expected. In fact, a little anxiety can be helpful as it can give you energy and keep you motivated while also showing the interviewer that the interview is important to you. After all, the last thing you want to do is to appear arrogant and unconcerned about the interview. Do not stress out about having sweaty palms or flushed cheeks before and during the interview – if you do, just remember that the interviewer has been in your shoes!

Recognizing & Managing Your Interview Anxiety

If anxiety is paralyzing you instead of motivating you, i.e. if it is hindering your ability to answer questions, ask yourself the following questions to help yourself take more control of the situation:

- When does anxiety hit? Before the interview or during the interview? This is important to know so that you can prepare yourself to deal with it in advance.
- What are you saying to yourself before or during the interview? We all have internal dialogs. You may be saying, “This is not going well,” “I am not going to get the job,” “I am not prepared,” or “I am never going to find a job.” These kinds of thoughts influence our stress levels, our self-esteem and our motivation. Become aware of these negative thought patterns so that you can replace them with positive thoughts (see “positive self-talk” below).

At-Home Interview Anxiety Coping Methods

Consider these best practices to help control your interview anxiety (adapted from Write Your Own Prescription for Stress, by Kenneth B. Matheny, Ph.D., & Healthy Habits, by Dr. Judith Pearson).

- **Interview practice and preparation**: Being well prepared is the best way to interview well in the face of your anxiety. Preparation will allow you to answer the questions well even though you feel very anxious.
- **Healthy eating, sufficient sleep and exercise**: A lot of the manifestations of anxiety are physical. Preparing yourself physically with a healthy breakfast and plenty of sleep will ensure that you are physically and mentally
on top of your game. Regular exercise can help reduce anxiety and tension, and improve the quality of your sleep.

- **Prescribed Breathing**: Balanced breathing can help you physically relax and mentally focus in preparation for your interview.
  - Sit comfortably but erectly with your feet firmly planted on the floor just slightly in front of your knees, hands resting on your lap.
  - Inhale for 3 seconds, hold for 12 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds. Repeat 5 times for a total of 6 cycles.
  - At the end of the sixth cycle, exhale explosively and sit quietly, allowing your breathing to return to normal.

- **Positive Self-talk**: Replace your negative thoughts with confident, positive thoughts like, “I am well prepared for this interview,” “I am a strong candidate for this job,” “I can interview well despite my anxiety because I am well prepared.” With awareness and practice, you can replace these negative, detrimental thoughts with positive, motivating thoughts.

**Getting Help with Anxiety**
If you feel your anxiety is too strong to be handled by any of the at-home interview anxiety coping methods and would like assistance strategizing for your interview, please contact the Center for Career Services and set up an appointment with a Career Coach. If you are experiencing overwhelming or inhibiting anxiety and require professional mental health services, contact the Marymount University Counseling Center at (703) 526-6861 or via email at counselingcenter.marymount.edu. **If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, dial 911 or visit your local emergency room.**

**ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW RESOURCES AT THE CENTER FOR CAREER SERVICES**
In addition to the information and examples this e-guide offers, the Center for Career Services also provides the following services and materials to supplement the interview preparation process and strongly encourages ALL students and alumni to take advantage of these FREE resources!

- **Mock Interviews**
  - A mock interview, also known as a practice interview, is a simulation of an actual job interview.
  - The mock interview provides you with an opportunity to practice for an interview and receive feedback and also helps you learn how to answer difficult questions, develop interview strategies, improve your communication skills and reduce your stress before an actual job interview.
  - Students and alumni can schedule a mock interview appointment with a Career Coach by calling 703-284-5960. The more specific information you can provide for your mock interviewer about the position you are interviewing for in advance, the better they can tailor their support during the mock interview.

- **Career Services Workshops & Events**
  - Our office hosts a variety of workshops throughout the academic year, several of which focus on interviewing, networking, the job and internship search, and professional behavior. In addition, we host industry-specific panel events, which serve as great opportunities to network with current professionals and fellow peers and can even potentially lead to interview opportunities! [For an up-to-date list of upcoming workshops and events, visit our website.](#)
  - If you are a student and would like to request a workshop or presentation on interviewing skills for an organization or club that you are a part of on campus, please email career.services@marymount.edu with your name, club/organization, and potential dates and times for your workshop and we will follow up with you!

- **Print Resources on Interviewing**
  - The Center for Career Services has a library of career resource books in the lobby of our main office in Rowley, Suite 1005 that students can check out for a period of two weeks.
Below are the books relating to Professional Etiquette and the Interview Process. For a full list of our print resources, check out [this document](#).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference #</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Year of Pub.</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PE 80</td>
<td>Job Interview Almanac</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Adams Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 81</td>
<td>Don’t take the Last Donut</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Judith Bowman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 82</td>
<td>Dress For the Job You Want</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Adrian Ackerman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE 83</td>
<td>Dress to Impress</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Joyce Nelson Shellhart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5000</td>
<td>201 Best Questions to Ask on Your Interview</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>John Kadar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5001</td>
<td>101 Great Answers to the toughest Interview Questions</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Ron Fry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5002</td>
<td>Finance interviews</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>D. Bhatawedeekhar</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIV 5003</td>
<td>Interview Magic</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Susan Brittion Whitcomb</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIV 5004</td>
<td>Job Interviews for Dummies</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Joyce Lain Kennedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>JIV 5005</td>
<td>Monster Careers: Interviewing</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Jeff Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5006</td>
<td>Perfect Phrases</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Matthew Deluca &amp; Nanette Deluca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5007</td>
<td>Preparing for the Behavior-Based Interview</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Terry L. Fitzwater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5008</td>
<td>The Neglected Art of Being interviewed</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>H. Anthony Medley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JIV 5009</td>
<td>Ace Your Case: Consulting Interviews</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>WetFeet Insider Guide</td>
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