

# Interview Guide

The interview is a crucial stage in any hiring or admissions process. Typically, only the top contenders are invited for interviews. This real-time professional dialogue allows decision-makers to get to know candidates beyond their qualifications on paper. As an applicant, the interview is your chance to convince the interviewer that you are an excellent candidate by informing them of your skills and qualifications. It is also a chance to learn more about the organization and assess whether the position aligns with your values and goals. Call or visit [Career Services](#) for interview prep help and to schedule a mock interview. We will tailor the mock interview to the position you're seeking and provide in-depth feedback to help you improve.

## Preparing for an Interview

Your goal in any interview is to persuade the interviewer that you are an excellent candidate. Take the time to develop your argument so that you can walk in with your own agenda for the discussion. What makes you a great fit for this position? Remember that all the interviewer knows about you is the information contained in your application. Your task is to educate them about your skills and experience, convincing them that you are the best pick for the job. Being well-prepared requires a solid working knowledge of the industry, the organization, the specific role, and your own qualifications.

- **Know the industry.** Every field has values, norms, and expectations. What do you know about the culture of your industry? Is your field more formal or more casual? What are the values of your field? What skills are most important? Do research and consult colleagues and mentors.
- **Know the organization.** What is the organization's mission? What do you know about the culture, structure, and short- and long-term goals of the company? Review the organization's website and all available materials, do your own research, and speak to contacts if possible.
- **Know the role.** What is this specific position, and how does it fit within the larger organization? What skills and tasks are most crucial in this role? Is the organization hoping to expand or change the role in any way? Comb through the job posting line by line to assess exactly how your qualifications match. Review all available materials and speak to contacts if possible.
- **Know yourself.** What are your most important skills and qualifications? What is your most relevant experience? Review your resume and cover letter—these documents got you the interview and serve as your script for the conversation. Also talk it over with colleagues, friends, and family.

Career Services can help you determine the expectations of your industry and provide activities and tools to help you prepare to promote yourself effectively.

## Practice

Just like in any performance, practice is the key to interview success. Interviews require you to promote yourself by selling the interviewer on your qualifications. This can be uncomfortable, but the more you practice, the more natural it will feel. Write out answers to common questions on paper. Say your answers out loud in the mirror. Record yourself on your phone, listen to the recordings, and try again. Ask a trusted friend or family member to run through questions with you. Schedule a mock interview at Career Services.

## Interview Formats and Stages

Organizations use many different kinds of interviews to evaluate applicants. Get as much information as you can about the interview protocols of the employer or program. When you are offered an interview, it is appropriate to ask if there is anything you should know about the process. Interviews range from just a few minutes to one or more full days and may include a wide range of activities. Some organizations use a multi-stage interview process. Here are some types of interviews you may encounter.

- **One on one.** A traditional interview with one interviewer and one interviewee.
- **Group interview.** Several candidates interviewed together.
- **Panel interview.** One candidate interviewed by a group of representatives.
- **Initial interview.** Many organizations use a brief initial screening interview, often conducted over the phone, to determine who will be offered a full interview. This is sometimes conducted by a human resources representative.
- **HR and technical interviews.** For some jobs, separate full-length interviews are conducted by a human resources representative, evaluating the candidate's overall qualifications and social skills, and by a technical specialist, evaluating the candidate's technical skills.
- **Second interviews and beyond.** After the first full in-person interview, some organizations ask candidate to return for further interviews. The organization winnows the group of finalists at each stage.
- **Demonstrations.** Some interviews include a demonstration component. Candidates may be asked to solve a relevant problem in real time or to prepare a short presentation.
- **Tours and meals.** Some interviews include less structured portions like a tour of the facility or a conversation over lunch. Career Services is available to answer questions about dining etiquette.
- **Multiple mini interview (MMI).** Candidates progress through a series of stations, responding to hypothetical scenarios. Used by some graduate and professional programs. [Learn more about MMI.](#)

## Interview Attire

Professional dress is an essential component of effective interviewing. Your appearance and attire communicate your professionalism, preparedness, and genuine interest in the opportunity. Keep in mind that industries, regions, and companies vary in attire expectations. A good rule of thumb is that appropriate interview attire is one step above

the usual attire for the workplace. In general, business professional attire is expected for all professional interviews. Business professional attire consists of a suit and tie, skirt suit, or pantsuit. Choose dark neutral colors, avoid patterns, maintain a neat appearance with clean, unwrinkled clothing, and make conservative, understated choices about shoes, accessories, make-up, facial hair, and fragrances.

It is usually better to overdress than to underdress for an interview. When in doubt, wear business professional attire. Career Services is available to answer questions about professional dress. Here are some quick examples illustrating different types of professional attire. These are examples for reference, not exhaustive lists.

Business Casual	Business Professional
Khakis, polo shirts, skirts, blouses, dress pants, dress shirts, etc.	Suit and tie, skirt suit, pantsuit
Some colors and patterns ok	Dark neutrals, few if any patterns

Workplace Attire	Interview Attire
Casual	Business casual
Business casual	Business professional
Business professional	Business professional

### Interview Day

Arriving at the location is the very first step in the interview. When you arrive tells the employer a lot about you. Arriving on time is critical—being late is considered disqualifying by most organizations. Arriving too early may inconvenience the interviewer and may make you appear anxious. For most interviews, arriving about ten minutes early is just right. Do a test drive so you know exactly how long it will take you to get there.

From the moment you arrive to the moment you leave, consider every interaction part of the interview. Be polite, friendly, and professional to everyone you encounter, including people you pass in the hallway and the person who greets you at the front desk. Assume that everything you say and do will be relayed to leadership.

Bring a professional-looking folder or “padfolio” with a notepad and copies of your resume and references. It’s a great idea to take notes during an interview. It is also appropriate to bring notes and to occasionally consult your notes or resume. Offer a copy of your reference sheet at the end of the interview, but don’t be concerned if the interviewer declines. In some industries, it is expected that candidates will have a portfolio or work sample available in a physical or digital format.

When the interviewer greets you, smile, make eye contact, and shake hands. Throughout the discussion, do your best to demonstrate your professionalism and your enthusiasm about the opportunity. Self-knowledge is crucial here. If you are a little shy and tend to give very short responses when nervous, try to slow down, take your time, and add a little more detail to each answer. If you are someone who tends to ramble and go on tangents when nervous, try to keep your responses concise and carefully focused on the question asked, relating everything back to the position. A mock interview is a great way to learn more about your interview style.

Be prepared to think on your feet. If you get stumped by a question, it is okay to say, “That’s a great question. Let me take a moment to think about that,” and take a few breaths as you organize your thoughts. Some interviewers ask weird or funny questions. The purpose of curveball questions is to gauge your ability to improvise and solve problems on the spot. Relate your answer back to the position, creatively demonstrating your qualifications. For example, if an interviewer asks what animal you would be, there is no right or wrong animal to pick, so long as you explain why in a way that shows you have the skills, experience, traits, and values needed for the role.

In addition to preparing for questions you expect to be asked, prepare a few questions you’d like to ask them. It’s a good idea to have these written down in your notepad. Choose substantive questions that demonstrate your interest in the organization, not detail-oriented questions about scheduling, pay, or benefits.

### **A Two-Way Street**

As a candidate, the interview is a valuable opportunity for you to learn more about the position and organization. Often, the interview is your first chance to visit the location, meet leaders and team members, and have a conversation with your potential future supervisor. Try to notice everything you can, big and small. What are your impressions of the staff and the space? Do people seem to enjoy working there? What can you learn about the organization and the specific role? After the interview, take the time to talk through the experience with someone you trust. Just as the interviewer is evaluating you, you are evaluating them to assess how well this opportunity suits your goals. You don’t have to accept the first job offer you get. Career Services is available to help you sort this out.

Keep in mind that the appropriate time to discuss pay, benefits, and scheduling is upon receiving an offer. See the negotiation guide from Career Services for more information on negotiating a job offer.

### **Follow Up**

Send a brief thank you message to everyone who interviewed you within one to two business days. Reiterate your interest and thank them for their time. You may send an email, note, or card. Here’s an example of a thank you email.

Subject Line: Internship Interview

Good afternoon Dr. Wells,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview at Community Inc. yesterday. I really enjoyed learning more about the organization's new youth initiatives. I would love to be a part of your next internship cohort. Please let me know if I can provide you with any further information.

Sincerely,  
Sara Garcia

If you have not heard anything, it is appropriate to reach out after about two weeks to check on the status of your application. Keep in mind that some organizations do not notify applicants who were not selected.

### **Sample Interview Questions**

#### Experience Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- How have your education and experience prepared you for this position?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

#### Employer Questions

- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What was your motivation in applying for this position?

#### Behavioral Questions

- Tell me about a time when you were working on a team and someone wasn't doing their fair share. How did you handle it?
- Give me an example of a time you made a mistake and learned from it.
- Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership.

*See our guide on the STAR method for more about answering behavioral interview questions.*

#### Questions to Ask the Interviewer

- Where do you think the organization is heading in the next five years?
- Describe your ideal candidate and how someone could meet or exceed those expectations.
- What should I know about the position beyond what was in the job description?