

Interviewing Techniques

The goal of creating a high quality resume and cover letter is to obtain an interview. Once that is achieved, it is easy for job seekers to shrug off an interview as simply a conversation with the employer. However, for many people interviewing can be the most challenging step in landing the job. Interviewing requires preparation and practice to be successful. The major objective of the interview is for the employer to get to know you as well as possible. This means not only your education and experiences, but your personality and beliefs as well. The goal of employers for any field is to find candidates who are a good “fit” within their organization.

Interview Types

There are five major interviewing formats, which include one-on-one, group, panel, series, and phone/webcam. Inquiring about the format of the interview can be beneficial in helping you to be better prepared.

- **One-on-One Interviews:** One-on-one interviews are conducted between the hiring manager and candidate.
- **Group Interviews:** In a group interview, there are usually several candidates interviewed as a group. This format can be useful for employers to screen candidates into the next round of interviewing by observing which candidates stand out.
- **Panel Interviews:** A panel interview is when a hiring panel (usually five or six people) interviews the candidate simultaneously.
- **Series Interviews:** A series interview is when candidates participate in a series of two or more interviews with different people or groups throughout the day. The interviews can be either one-on-one, group, panel formats, or a combination of the three. Sometimes each person or group will offer a different kind of interview (behavioral, etc.)
- **Phone Interviews:** A phone interview should be treated the same as a face-to-face interview.
- **Skype/Webcam Interviews:** An interview via Skype or any type of videoconferencing should be treated similar to a phone or face-to-face interview.

Preparation

- Practice answering questions you may be asked in the interview. Thinking and rehearsing your responses in advance will help you more effectively articulate the most important information.
- Write down the interview time, location, interviewer’s name and title, directions, and parking suggestions.
- Ask what format the interview will be in and with whom you will be meeting, so you may plan ahead.
- Check in 10 minutes early, but no more than 15 minutes early.
- Bring extra copies of your materials in a padfolio and have your papers arranged for easy reference (resume, references, transcripts, and portfolio).
- Greet the receptionist politely and let him/her know why you are there.
- Provide a firm handshake coupled with a smile and good eye contact.
- Pay attention to your appearance. You want to appear professional, so dress conservatively.

Research yourself

- Identify your skills, abilities, values, and interests.
- Assess yourself in terms of creativity, leadership, communication, interpersonal, and technical skills.
- Examine your goals and objectives, and decide what you want to do and where you want to do it.
- Review work experiences, volunteer experience, extracurricular activities, accomplishments, and awards.
- Analyze your strengths, weaknesses, personal aspirations, work values, attitudes, and expectations.
- Review your educational background (classes, projects, presentations, research, major, and minor).

Research the job and company

- If you are applying for a specific job, understand what the job description and the job title mean.
- Visit the company website.
- Research the company and job before the interview, including size, type of products or services provided, company history, geographical location and company headquarters, competition, and recent items in the news. Do not simply preview their website.
- Know how your skills, educational background, and experiences fit with the position and organization and why hiring you will be beneficial.
- Prepare questions to ask the interviewer that reflect your knowledge of the position and company.
- Research salary so you are prepared to discuss it if it comes up.

During the Interview

- Approach the interview with a positive attitude and sincere interest. Be friendly, relaxed, and be yourself.
- Let the interviewer initiate the conversation. Do not be afraid of pauses in the conversation; take time to think. Silence is okay! It aids in reflection and thought.
- Do not monopolize the conversation, but be an active participant.
- Be an attentive listener when the interviewer is speaking.
- Respond to questions with more than a yes or no, make sure to incorporate specific results to highlight your qualifications and accomplishments.
- Accentuate the positives, be optimistic. Do not apologize or offer excuses for shortcomings – we all have situations that challenge us.
- Answer negative questions positively. For example, when answering the questions “what are your 3 greatest challenges?” It is important to highlight what you are doing to improve upon those areas.
- Emphasize what you can do for the organization.
- Never criticize a former employer, colleague, teacher, or institution.
- Do not discuss salary until you have an offer, or if the employer brings it up first.
- To close, thank each interviewer and shake his or her hands, re-state your interest in the position.

Phone Interviews

Some employers use telephone or videoconferencing interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment. Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. They are also used as a way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates.

Be Prepared

- Keep a log of the companies and jobs for which you have applied. This will help you be better prepared if you are called unexpectedly. Have at least one substantive question ready for each company to which you have applied.
- Have a copy of your resume, transcript, planner/calendar and the job description in front of you.
- Make sure you will not be interrupted or encounter any unwanted distractions.
- Stand up, your voice projects stronger.
- Prepare a “30-second commercial” to sell yourself to the company and practice, practice, practice. This could be the answer to “Tell me why we should hire you,” “Tell me about yourself,” or “How have you been preparing yourself for this job?”

Be Professional

- Record a professional message for your answering machine/voicemail.
- Turn off music or the TV during the interview.
- Do not eat, drink or chew gum.
- Do not type on your computer or send text messages.

- Treat the phone interview just as you would an in-person interview. Dress in what makes you feel most confident because it makes a noticeable difference in both your mindset and your presentation.
- Use professional language. Do not use casual language because you are on the phone and it feels more informal.
- Try to avoid filler words, such as “um” and “like”. The interviewer will notice these words even more than usual because they cannot see your nonverbal behaviors.
- Do not put the interviewer on hold or answer call waiting.

Be Personable

- Be enthusiastic-show interest in the position and the organization.
- Talk slowly and be articulate.
- Ask pertinent questions about the job and the company.
- Think before you speak.
- Remember the interviewer cannot see your body language or gestures. Your voice inflection and the words you say are all he or she has to go on. A smile on your face will come through in your voice and reflect enthusiasm.
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time.

Skype and Videoconferencing Interviews

- Dress professionally, just as you would for an in-person interview. Do not wear complicated or distracting patterned blouses or ties. Basic and solid colors are ideal.
- Consider your background for the video, a room with a door or minimal decorations on the walls is best. Career Services can provide you with a space to perform the Skype/video interview.
- Double check your internet connection and signal at least a half-hour before your interview. If you run into issues, you will have time to fix internet connections, audio or visual issues.
- Communicate with your interviewer to confirm logistics. If you do not have a Skype username, create a professional username prior to the interview that the employer can connect with.
- Silence your cell phone, turn off the TV or any music playing. Limit all distractions as much as possible.

On-Campus Interviews

On-campus interviews offer opportunities for students to interview for full-time and internship positions without leaving campus.

- Schedule on-campus interviews by logging into [Hire-a-Falcon](#).
- Prepare for your interview by researching the organization and setting up a mock interview with a Peer Advisor or Career Counselor.

Cancellation and No-Show Policy

- UW-River Falls Career Services requires attendance for students who sign up for an on-campus interview, so please make every effort to attend your appointment. Cancellations are strongly discouraged, and no-shows are unacceptable. Not only do you inconvenience the employer, but you may also deprive another student of a valuable interview opportunity. Cancellations and no-shows result in suspensions from future interviews and Hire-a-Falcon until the specific requirements have been met to rebuild the relationship that may have been severed.

Behavioral Interviewing and the STAR Technique

Many organizations use behavioral interviewing in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It provides a more objective set of facts for employers to use in their decision process.

To master behavioral interviewing, you must give specific examples to illustrate the quality you are being asked about. Past performance examples may come from work experience, internships, activities, hobbies, volunteer work, family life, etc. Using persuasive language, tell a “story” about a specific situation, remembering to give the conclusion and what you learned from the experience. Prepare for the interview by having several different “STARS” in mind.

The STAR Technique

Situation: Describe the specific situation. Set up your story.

Task: What was the task you were trying to accomplish? Tell who, what, when, where, and why (include only relevant details!).

Action: What did **you** do to solve the problem or meet the task?

Result: Specify results. What happened? Give numbers, volume, dollars, etc. Link the skills you were demonstrating in this example to the specific job. Tell how the employer is going to benefit from hiring you.

Example:

“Please tell me about your ability to work as part of a team.”

- **Situation** – I have a great deal of experience working in teams. In particular, during my senior year, I took a marketing research class.
- **Task** – For the class, we had to complete a group project where we conducted research, analyzing the marketing techniques and identifying problematic marketing within local organizations. Our group chose to investigate why students did not utilize Career Services on campus.
- **Action** – To do this, our team decided to survey students as they entered and left the campus library, asking them questions addressing their use of Career Services. We had to work well together to develop the survey as well as coordinate times that we stood outside the library. In particular, I was in charge of creating the schedule for the library and contacting the library staff to inform them of our research.
- **Result** – As a result, our group gained a better understanding of why students under-utilized Career Services. We also shared our data with Career Services allowing them to create effective marketing strategies. In addition, our group received an A on the project. I understand that this job requires someone who is detailed-oriented and able to work well with others. I believe my education and work experience have prepared me well, as I have been required to work with a variety of groups in each of my courses and jobs. (Hint: open your portfolio and pull out the appropriate example to show the interviewer).

Using Your Portfolio in the Interview

Before the Interview

- Thoroughly research the organization and position. Visit the employer's website to learn more about their mission and values, products they make or services they provide, the history of the organization, the culture, future trends, and competitors. Construct 10-15 specific examples that target the employer's needs, using the STAR Technique.
- Know your portfolio; be able to locate items quickly during the interview to back up your "STARs."
- Visit Career Services to role-play using your portfolio in a mock interview with a Career Counselor or Peer Advisor.

During the Interview

- First develop rapport with the interviewer(s), then utilize your portfolio.
- Expect to use your portfolio 3-5 times throughout the course of the interview. It is important not to overuse it because you want the focus to remain on you and your qualifications, not your portfolio.
- Steps to using your portfolio:
 1. Respond to the question you are asked by providing a specific example using the STAR Technique.
 2. Inform the interviewer(s) that you have an example to share, remove the individual item and hand it to him/her, and close your portfolio leaving it unzipped for future use.
 3. Explain the relevance of the document.
 4. Pass the artifact around for everyone to review. Continue to speak while the interviewers pass the artifact. Do not rush them by waiting to speak until they are finished reviewing.
 5. Collect all examples and put them back in your portfolio at the end of the interview.
- Do not leave your portfolio behind. You never want to lose it or relinquish control over how it is used!
- Request business cards from interviewer(s).
- Follow up with a hand written or typed thank you note within 24 hours.

Illegal Questions

Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask. Questions on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process must be related to the job for which you are applying. This means employers should not be asking about your race, gender, religion, marital status, age, disabilities, ethnic background, country of origin, sexual preferences or age.

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- You can answer the question; however, if you choose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that isn't related to the job; in fact, you might be giving the "wrong" answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
- You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational.
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, if the interviewer asks, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" or "What country are you from?" you've been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with "I am authorized to work in the United States." Similarly, let's say the interviewer asks, "Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?" You might answer, "I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires."

Dressing for the Interview

Everyone

- Limit fragrance! Be aware of scented body lotions and deodorants as well. Interview rooms are often quite small, and many individuals are allergic to fragrances.
- A less than perfect appearance translates to how you would perform the job. Shoes should be shined, hands and fingernails well groomed, avoid wrinkled clothing and over-the-top accessories.
- Cover tattoos and take out obvious piercings.
- Dress above what the job requires.

Men

- First choice in most instances is a matched suit, in solid or pinstriped grey, black or navy blue. Second choice, slacks and a coordinating blazer.
- Belts should be leather with no obvious signs of wear and should coordinate with pants.
- Socks should be dark and in the same color family as your slacks and cover your legs at all times. No athletic socks.
- No necklaces or jewelry other than a wedding ring, class ring, and a dress watch.
- Resist conversational ties; stick with silk ties in a stripe, paisley, or small pattern.
- Wear polished dress shoes in the same color family as your suit and belt.



Women

- First choice, classic suit, in navy blue, grey, brown or black. Second choice, skirt or pants and coordinating blazer.
- Generally, dresses are not a good interview choice.
- Wear hair up if it is very long or you fidget with it when nervous.
- Minimal jewelry: pearls and classic gold/silver pieces (nothing that dangles).
- If you chose to wear nail polish, make sure it is not chipped and in an appropriate color; nails should not be excessively long.
- Wear pantyhose with skirts, even in the summer; make sure to coordinate with clothing or skin tone.
- Shoes should be a closed heel, closed toe pump in a conservative color that matches your belt. Make sure the heel is a manageable height and comfortable.
- Makeup that makes you look natural- make sure you do not have lines or lipstick on your teeth.



Sample Interview Questions

Commonly Asked Questions

- Tell me about yourself....
- Tell me something I wouldn't know from your resume.
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
- What is your work/leadership style?
- What are your short/long-term goals?
- Why are you interested in our company? What do you know about the company? How does this fit into your overall career goals?
- What do you look for in a supervisor?
- How would your peers/subordinates/supervisor describe you?
- We are interviewing many qualified candidates. Why should we hire you?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What single message would you like me to remember to convince me you are the right person for this job?

Communication

- How do you keep subordinates, colleagues, bosses, and clients informed?
- Please describe your communication style.

Culture/Work Environment

- What did you like least about your last position?
- Do you have a geographical work location preference and are you able to travel?
- What are your expectations for a new job and a new company?
- What is most appealing about this position? Least?
- What are the advantages of diversity in the workplace?
- How would you describe the type of structure, feedback and direction you need in order to excel?

Qualifications/Accomplishments

- What makes you unique in comparison to other candidates?
- Looking back at college, what were your greatest challenges?
- Why did you select the school/college/university you attended? What made you decide on your major?
- What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
- How have your extracurricular activities prepared you for the kind of work you have done?
- What is the most important lesson you have learned?
- What causes you pressure or stress? How do you cope with stress?
- How does your experience qualify you for this position?
- What has been your greatest life achievement?
- How have you successfully worked with difficult people?
- What do you think it takes for a person to be successful in your field?
- How will your education help you to excel at your future career?
- In the non-related positions you've held, what transferable skills have you gained that you will apply in your future career?

Management/Leadership

- Describe your biggest leadership challenge.
- How do you motivate team members?
- What kinds of leadership roles have you held?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- How do you cope with change?

Interpersonal

- What role do you typically play on a team?
- What kinds of people do you like to work with?
- Tell me why you would be a good team player.
- Describe the kind of individuals who are difficult for you to work with.
- How would you rate your effectiveness in relating to others?
- If a friend or professor described you, what three adjectives would they choose?

Salary

- What has been your salary history?
- What are your salary requirements?

Problem Solving

- How do you manage/resolve conflict?
- Tell me about your most difficult decision.
- Tell me how you handled an ethical dilemma.

Motivational

- What are the three most important things to you in a new position?
- What values drive you in your professional career?
- How do you personally define success?
- What has been your toughest professional challenge?
- What professional experience has been most valuable to you?
- What consideration have you given to further enhance your performance and personal growth?
- What are some examples of activities and surroundings that motivate you?
- What do you do when things are slow at work?
- What is the most useful criticism you've ever received?
- What does "growth" mean to you? What does "challenge" mean to you?

Sample Behavioral Based Interview Questions

Leadership

- Tell me about a time when you accomplished something significant that wouldn't have happened if you had not been there to make it happen.
- Tell me about a time when you tried to accomplish something and were unsuccessful. What actions did you take? What were the results?
- Describe for me a time when you may have been disappointed in your behavior.
- Tell me about a time when you were a leader of a group, which was successful in reaching a goal or finishing a project.
- Tell me about a time when you've had to develop leaders under you.
- What would you say are your two greatest weaknesses? How do you plan to overcome them?
- Describe the situation that best exemplifies your analytical skills.
- Describe a situation where your work, idea, or personality was criticized. How did you react?
- Tell me about a time you failed and the impact it had on you.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Give some instances where you anticipated problems or influenced new directions.
- Tell me about a decision you have made that you would do differently today.
- Tell me about a time that you misjudged a person.
- Tell me about a situation or position where you took extra initiative and assumed responsibilities that were beyond your written or understood job description.

Organization and Time Management

- Describe the tools you use to manage your time daily, weekly and monthly.
- Think about a deadline you were unable to meet. What factors contributed to that situation?
- Describe a time when you had too many things to do (work and possibly personal) and talk about how you prioritized your time.
- How much time do you spend organizing your day? When do you do it and what is the impact?
- Tell me about a time when you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine the top priority?

Teamwork

- Describe a project you accomplished as part of a team or work group. What was your role and what were your specific contributions to the project's success?
- Tell me how you increased teamwork among a previous group with whom you worked.
- Give me an example of a group or team decision that was made that you felt was wrong or was something with which you disagreed. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- Describe examples of an effective team project and one that was less effective. What was the difference? What did you learn from these experiences?
- What would you do, or have you done, if you learned one of the members failed to meet commitments to the team?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a co-worker or classmate who was not doing his/her fair share of the work. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you were able to motivate others to obtain the desired results.
- Tell me about a difficult situation with a co-worker and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time that you didn't work well with a supervisor. What was the outcome and how would you have changed the outcome?

Creativity and Innovation

- Tell me about a situation in which you were able to find a new and better way of doing something significant.
- Tell me about a time when you were creative in solving a problem.
- Describe a time when you were able to come up with new ideas that were key to the success of an activity or project.
- Tell me about a time when you had to bring out the creativity in others.
- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a problem with no rules or guidelines in place.
- Tell me about the last time you failed to meet a goal or objective. What plan of action did you take to get you back on track?
- Tell me about a presentation you had to give. What did you do and what was the outcome?

Customer Service

- Tell me about a time when you felt you went beyond the call of duty in helping a client or customer.
- Describe a situation in which you were not able to satisfy a customer.
- Tell me about a situation in which you were proud of the way you handled a customer problem. Tell me specifically what you did to achieve a positive result.
- Describe the most challenging customer service experience you've had and how you handled it.
- Describe a situation in which you had to work with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation? Is there anything you would have done differently in hindsight?

Questions for the Interviewer

Employers expect that candidates will arrive at an interview with several questions for them. It is very rare for an interview to end without the interviewer asking, “Do you have any questions for me?” Having several well-thought out questions ready to ask shows your preparation, interest in the position and appreciation of the organization and its goals. These questions should be formulated from research performed on the organization. Some common questions that could be asked are:

Human Resources:

- How would you describe the position?
- To whom does the position report? May I meet my supervisor?
- Describe the organization’s structure.
- How would you describe the culture of the office/organization?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?

Colleagues/Peers:

- What is it like to work here? What do you like about working here?
- Describe your job/role here. What do you enjoy most about your job? Least?
- Describe how work gets done here. As a team? As independent contributors?
- How are decisions made?
- How will this position influence you? Your group/department?
- How would you describe the organization culture?
- How long have you been with the company?
- Please describe a typical day on the job.
- What are upcoming projects/tasks that you will be working on?

Hiring Manager:

- In what direction is the business moving?
- What opportunities exist for professional growth and development?
- Can you explain the performance review process, or how I would be evaluated?
- What makes your organization different from your competitors?
- Describe the typical first year assignments for this position.
- What, specifically, are you looking for in the candidate you hire for this position?
- What personal qualities, skills, or experience would help someone do well in this position?
- What do you see as the greatest challenge in this position?
- How would you describe your management/leadership style?
- What are your 60/90/120 day goals for this position?
- What is your vision for this department/division?
- How does this position interact with other departments?
- How can I be most successful in this role?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?

Note that these questions focus on work content and workplace environment. It is not appropriate to ask questions about salary in the initial interview. Ideally, the employer will initiate the salary discussion in a subsequent interview.