INTERVIEWING
TECHNIQUES

1. Preparation

- **Appearance:** Dress for success. Think professional and conservative.
- **Research:** Understand the job description and research information about the company.
- **Background:** Know your own skills, educational background, and experiences. Know why hiring you would be beneficial.
- **Rehearse:** Practice your responses to difficult questions, so you won’t be caught off guard.

2. Right Before

- **What to Bring:** Bring extra copies of your materials (resume, cover letter, references), and writing tools such as a padfolio and pen.
- **Arriving:** Don’t be late! Check in 10-15 minutes before the interview.
  - Turn off your cell phone during the interview.
- **Presence:** Provide a firm handshake coupled with a smile and good eye contact.
  - Be kind and respectful. You want to leave a positive impression.

3. During the Interview

- **Answering Questions:** Be an attentive listener. Understand the question being asked and its context to ensure you give a proper response.
  - Respond to questions with more than a yes or no answer.
  - Emphasize what you can do for the organization.
  - Highlight your qualifications with real life experiences and examples.
- **To Close:** Thank each interviewer, shake hands, and re-state your interest in the position.

Common Nonverbal Mistakes

- **67%** Failure to make eye contact
- **38%** Lack of smile
- **33%** Fidgeting too much
- **47%** Having little knowledge of company
- **33%** Bad posture

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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 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 six major interviewing formats, which include one-on-one, group, panel, series, phone, and webcam. Inquiring about the format of the interview can be beneficial in helping you to be better prepared. Below is a description of each type of interview and items to consider for each format.

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<tr>
<th>INTERVIEW TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>ITEMS TO CONSIDER</th>
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| Phone          | -Interview over the phone  
                 -Also referred to as a “screening” interview or “weeder” interview  
                 -First round interview used to narrow the candidate pool  
                 -Typically around 30 minutes and with a Human Resources professional  
                 -Also a type of interview used to minimize cost for out-of-town candidates | -A phone interview is a “real” interview.  
- The interviewer is unable to see your nonverbal communication, and it may be difficult to convey enthusiasm on the phone. Smile. Smiling changes the tone of your voice and helps convey enthusiasm.  
- The interviewer may call you and want to conduct the interview on the spot. If this is the case, make sure you are in a quiet location free of interruptions. Otherwise, ask to schedule a time to speak with the interviewer.  
- Utilize notes, the position description, your resume, and cover letter.  
- Don’t try to fill all moments of silence. The interviewer is likely taking notes.  
- Remember to consider time zone differences and be aware of interview logistics (who is calling who). Ensure you have good phone reception. |
| Skype/Webcam   | -Sometimes used as a first-round interview and other times used to minimize cost for out-of-town candidates | -Dress professionally, just as you would for an in-person interview.  
- Consider your background and lighting before the interview (test it).  
- Look at the camera, not the image of yourself reflected on your screen.  
- 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 (who is contacting who, time zones, etc.). If you do not have a Skype username, create a professional username prior to the interview.  
- Silence your cell phone and turn off the TV or any music playing. Limit all distractions as much as possible.  
- Have a back-up plan in case technology fails (phone number for employer). |
| One-on-One     | -Conducted between the hiring manager or human resources representative and candidate | -Maintain proper eye contact throughout the interview. |
| Panel          | -Hiring panel (usually five or six people) interview a candidate simultaneously | -Multiple people may be asking questions. Make eye contact with everyone.  
- Ask for the job titles of the interviewers prior to the interview so you can ask appropriate questions. |
| Group          | -Several candidates interviewed as a group  
                 -Often used by employers to evaluate which candidates stand out/should be moved to the next round | -This is a common type of interview for sales positions.  
- You want to speak enough, but also be sure to listen to others. A group interview is a way for an employer to see how you interact with others.  
- Be sure to reflect on what makes you unique prior to the interview. You do not want to repeat the same answer as everyone else in the group. |
| Series         | -Candidates participate in a series of two or more interviews with different people or groups throughout the day | -Interviews can be multiple formats (panel, one-on-one, etc.).  
- Try to obtain a schedule of the day and know who you are interviewing with, so you can best prepare.  
- Bring a snack and water in case you have any downtime between interviews (you may need to refuel as these days can be long). |
Dressing for the Interview

**General Guidelines**

- **Shoes**: Should be shined, neat and clean; match suit and belt
- **Hands**: And fingernails well groomed; no chipped nail polish
- **Clothes**: Should be wrinkle free
- **Piercings and Tattoos**: Cover tattoos and take out obvious piercings
- **Jewelry**: Avoid over-the-top accessories (nothing excessive)
- **Hair**: Wear hair up if it is long and you fidget with it
- **Makeup**: That makes you look natural; no lines or lipstick on teeth

**Suit Jacket and Pants/Skirts**

- Should be the same color
- Belts should show no obvious wear and should coordinate with pants as well as shoes and socks
- Ties stick to silk ties in a plain, stripe, paisley or small pattern
- Socks should be dress socks, no athletic socks
- Colors kept to a dark, neutral, solid color palette
- Skirts should be knee length
- **NO** bold prints or bright colors

**Things to keep in mind:**

Statistics show that first impressions are determined by:

- **55%** the way you dress, act and walk through the door
- **38%** the quality of your voice, grammar and confidence
- **7%** the words you choose to say
On-Campus Interviews
On-campus interviews offer opportunities for students to interview for professional and internship positions without leaving campus.

- Employers interviewing in connection with the Career Fair will be passing out interview invitations to candidates of interest at their booths for on-campus interviews.
- Prepare for your interview by researching the organization and setting up a mock interview with a peer career consultant or career consultant by participating in Mock Interview Day.

Cancellation and No-Show Policy
- UW-River Falls Career Services requires attendance for students who sign-up for on-campus interviews as UWRF has worked hard to develop strong partnerships with employers. We ask that students uphold their interview commitments to represent the university, their academic program, and themselves in the best possible manner.

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 is not 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 have been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Similarly, if 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 this job requires.”

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 and remember to provide a conclusion explaining 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. For example, I took a marketing research class during my senior year.

- **Task** – For the class, we had to complete a group project where we conducted research on local organizations that included analyzing the marketing techniques and identifying problematic marketing. 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 about 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).

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 have been disappointed in your behavior.
- Tell me about a time when you were a leader of a group that 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 you disagreed with or felt was wrong. 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 fulfill commitments to the team?
• Tell me about a time you had to deal with a co-worker or classmate who was not doing their fair share of the work. What did you do, and what was the outcome?
• Tell me about a time 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 you didn’t work well with a supervisor. How did you handle this? What was the outcome? Were you happy with the outcome? Why or why not?

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?

Additional Sample Interview Questions

Commonly Asked Questions
• Tell me about yourself.
• Why did you choose UWRF and/or your major?
• 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?
• Have you had any related experience? If so, describe. If not, what have you learned from your unrelated experiences that can transfer to our company and position?
• 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 to experience 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?
• What do you think it takes for a person to be successful in your field?
• 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 have you successfully worked with difficult people?
• 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?

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? Will I meet the supervisor during the interview process?
- Describe the organization’s structure.
- How would you describe the culture of the office/organization?
- In what ways 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 the person in this position interact with you? Your group/department?
- How would you describe the organization’s culture?
- How long have you been with the company?
- Please describe a typical day on the job.
- What upcoming projects/tasks will you 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.