



INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Carleton College Career Center

Johnson House | 507.222.4293

careercenter@carleton.edu

Introduction

An interview is your opportunity to learn about the job and the employer, as much as it is their opportunity to learn about you. Although the interview process can sometimes be anxiety-provoking, it is primarily a mutual exchange of information. Viewing the interview as a conversation, rather than as an interrogation, can help to put you at ease. It also helps to remember that the interviewer was once in your shoes and

Purposes of Interviewing

Be aware that the purposes of interviewing are to market your skills, and to allow the employer to discover why you want to work there specifically, whether or not you can do the job, and if you are a good fit. Ultimately, the goal of a first interview is to get a second interview!

Key Topics:

This guide will help you to feel confident in your interviewing skills and will discuss the following:

- Purpose of interviewing
- Preparing through research and practice
- Tips on standing out
- Types of interviews
- Interview questions (and how to approach them)
- Closing the interview
- Post Interview

Preparing for the Interview

Job/Industry

Familiarize yourself with the job description and be able to provide specific and concrete examples about the job responsibilities stated. Research general industry trends happening in the news and take time to anticipate any additional questions the interviewer might want to know based on the industry. One easy way to do this is to type the company and/or the industry into Google and read through some of the most popular (and reliable) sources and topics.

Employer

Find out as much as possible about the company's purpose and key initiatives. Review the organization's website and look for client information, annual reports, company mission, and newsletters and general language used. Suggestions for ways to research:

- Organization website
- Alumni/Personal Contacts - Find people who work in the organization to inquire of 'insider tips'. To get started, search through the Carleton Alumni Directory, the Career Center's directory for alumni, and LinkedIn
- External tools such as Vault.com, GlassDoor, and Nexis Uni. Nexis Uni can be accessed through Gould Library. It allows you to search the full text of newspapers, foreign and domestic, as well as business, legal, medical, and reference publications

Yourself

This may sound obvious, but it is important be prepared to discuss your experiences, goals, and accomplishments. Take note of specific examples that effectively relay your expertise. Create a document that bullet points as many specific experiences as possible to reference in your interview. The most consistent thing we hear from recruiters and hiring managers is that a student was not specific enough and unable to translate their transferable skills and experiences to the responsibilities of the position. Spend time reading through every line of your resume so that you can speak

Practice Interviews

It is almost impossible to practice too much for an interview. Being prepared indicates to the employer that you are serious about the position and would be a great employee. Take advantage of the Career Center by scheduling a practice interview, and simply practicing with friends or in front of a mirror. The more you prepare, the more competitive you will be and the more natural

What is a Practice Interview?

Practice interviews are a pretend interview with a Career Center staff member, or other non-hiring person, who will ask you questions you are likely to hear from the organization you are pursuing.

How Do I Set Up a Practice Interview?

You may schedule a practice interview appointment with a career coach through Handshake, just as you would schedule any other appointment (Be sure to schedule the practice interview appointment for 60 minutes, two back to back appointments). To make the most of the time, we ask that you email to the career coach you scheduled an appointment with the following information in advance, after you have set the appointment:

- details about the position/program to which you are applying
- a brief overview of the organization
- your resume and cover letter

If you do not have a particular position or program in mind, feel free to submit information for a “hypothetical” situation of interest. We also recommend that you dress for success for the practice interview so that we can assist you in putting your best foot forward.

Note:

It is recommended to do at least one practice interview early on in your job search process so that you will feel ready and confident when the organization calls to schedule your

Interview Etiquette

Timeliness

- Be on time! Arrive about 5-10 minutes early to give yourself time to catch your breath and relax for a minute
- If you get there earlier, wait outside or drop by a coffee shop prior to entering the office. Remember, first impressions make a big difference

Body Language

- Body language can often tell just as much, if not more, to an interviewer than the words you say. Maintain good posture and be careful to eliminate nervous ticks (pen tapping, knuckle cracking, etc.)
- Offer a firm handshake, and always maintain good eye contact. Be courteous to every single person you meet and offer a smile. Remember that interviewers want to hire people they will enjoy being around on regular basis

Professional Attire

- Attire varies by industry, but it is strongly recommended to err on the side of being overly professionally dressed, especially in an interview
- Typical professional business attire is a matching suit (usually of a conservative color, such as black, navy or charcoal). Depending on your gender expression, it is also appropriate to wear a tie with a suit or a clean, pressed button up and neutral colored nylons with a skirt
- Shoes should be polished and hair should be neat and out of your face. Be careful not to wear distracting jewelry or accessories, and limit your use of perfume or cologne (your interviewer may be allergic)
- Occasionally, business casual attire is considered appropriate. This attire is less common for interviewing but is a more relaxed version of business attire, and may include khakis with a button-down shirt and tie or mixed separates. No jacket is required, but a casual blazer is acceptable

Placement of your Belongings

- Turn your phone on SILENT and leave it in your bag before you enter the building
- When applicable, place your coat and bag out of the way. Utilize a coat closet if available so that you do not have to worry about juggling these items during your initial

Documents to Bring to the Interview

- Leather Portfolio - Invest in a black, leather bound portfolio that you can use to carry your resumes, references, pen, and paper. You will use this many times throughout your career so it is worth it to get one now
- Résumé/Cover Letter - Bring 5-10 extra copies on resume paper (resume paper is available for purchase in the Career Center). Oftentimes the interviewer will have printed this out in advance but it is always wise to have extra copies just in case
- References - Create a one page document that has your information on the top of the page, along with 3-4 people the interviewer could contact for references. Information on your references should include: name, title, organization, how they know you (if it is not obvious), email, and phone number. It is also wise to include a basic location, such as city and state, especially if your references are not in the same time zone

The Interview

Every organization has a slightly different interview process. For many organizations, you will experience at least two to three rounds with different people. This is slightly more intense for full time opportunities, than internships.

Interview Stages

Screening Interview

Typically the first round interview. This could take place over the phone, video conferencing, or in person. It usually does not last more than 30 minutes and is a great way for the interviewer to quickly determine if you are a potential fit with their organization and that particular opportunity.

On Site Interview

After you have passed the first round of interviews, the next round is typically held on site to enable you to get a feel for the work space, as well as meet and interview with additional

Specialized Interview Situations

Networking Mixer

Some organizations schedule a pre-interview mixer with other candidates and current employees. The purpose is two-fold as a way for the organization to get to know you in a casual setting, as well as help you get a feel for the culture of the team.

Group

These are more common with large internship and leadership development programs. Oftentimes multiple candidates are put in small groups and asked similar questions at the same time and/or asked to work on a group project with other candidates while the interviewer(s) takes notes.

Board/Panel

This is a situation where the organization has a hiring committee that is interviewing as a group. The important thing to remember here is to do your best to make eye contact with every person in the room and connect as well as

Over a Meal

This is most common for organizations that require work with clients or other external constituents. It is important here to be courteous, always wait for the host to make the first move and keep your conversation professional (even though you are in a casual setting). Also, try not to order messy food

Types of Interviews

Traditional

Questions to gain basic summary information about yourself, strengths and weaknesses. (e.g., What are your main strengths as it pertains to this position?).

Behavioral

These are the most common type of questions because it requires the interviewee to provide specific examples of their past experiences that demonstrate skills and strengths. (e.g., Tell me about a time when...).

Off the Résumé

It is not uncommon for an interviewer to point to an experience on your resume and say: "Tell me more about this." It is important to be able to speak eloquently and give examples about everything on your resume.

Case

This type of question is most applicable to candidates interviewing for a job or internship in consulting. However, it is possible in other industries as well. In these questions, the candidate is provided with a scenario (typically business related) and asked to analyze the problem. For more information on these interviews we recommend borrowing the book *Case In Point* from the Career Center and scheduling an appointment with a staff member to review the best approach with these questions.

Different types of case interviews include:

- Brain Teasers - Why are manhole covers round?
- Market Sizing - How many golf balls could you fit inside a 747 airplane?
- Business Case - You have a client that is family-owned and has seen their profits decrease over the past few years. What can you do to help them?

Answering Interview Questions

Verbal Communication:

Watch your “ums,” “likes” and excessive rambling. Practice will help.

Solid & Specific Answers:

Be as specific and concise as possible. Content and delivery both matter. Avoid overly personal or irrelevant examples (e.g., roommates, etc.). Always choose an example which has

When answering interview questions, there are three critical things to remember:

Be Relevant

Be Specific

Be Consistent

STAR Method:

In order to stay on track (especially while answering behavioral questions), we recommend using this format:

- **Situation** - Describe the situation you were in (e.g., the name of the internship or course you were taking)
- **Task** - Identify the specific project you were working on and briefly discuss what it entailed
- **Action** - This is the most important element! Specifically identify what YOUR action was related to the question that was asked
- **Result** - Close the question by stating an outcome to your situation

Example Response:

Question: Describe a time that demonstrated your leadership ability.

STAR Method Response:

“(S) Last summer, during my internship at XYZ Company, (T) I had the opportunity to be the point person for a project amongst our group of 3 interns. (A) I brought everyone together to divide up the tasks based on each person’s strengths and chose a deadline to bring the project together. (R) We were able to pull together a great finished project and our supervisor was able to use it in their meeting with the stakeholders.”

Closing the Interview

Asking questions at the end of an interview indicates that you are interested in the position and have spent time thinking about it. You only need to ask 2-3 questions but you should have 5-10 questions prepared in advance, since some will likely be answered in the process of the interview. Ask questions that focus on the job, its responsibilities and its opportunities. Questions about salary, fringe benefits, vacation, etc. should not be asked until you receive an offer. Keep in mind who your audience is (i.e., the recruiter in HR might not be the best person to ask about the culture of the department).

Here are a few examples of questions you might ask:

- I noticed X on your website. Can you tell me more about that? (Shows that you've done your research)
- What are the ideal skills you are seeking from the individual you hire for this position?
- Can you tell me about opportunities for professional growth at this organization?
- How would you describe the culture of this department? Why do you like working here?
- What are the main goals of this organization/department? How do you see this role contributing to that?
- What do you see as being the main accomplishments in this position in the first 6 months to a year?
- ALWAYS ASK THIS! What are the next steps in your hiring process? (This question gives you a time frame for follow-up)

Post-Interview

Following-Up

While following up with an employer is recommended, a good rule of thumb is to wait at least a week to follow up, then try one more time a week later if they did not respond. If there is still no response, let it go for the time being and use your best judgment. You do not want to harass the employer! If the interviewer indicated that you should hear from them the following week, wait until that specified time and reach out if

Thank-You Note:

Always send a thank you note (email is usually fine) within 24-48 hours following the interview. This is a good opportunity to briefly reiterate why you are a good candidate, as well as remind the interviewer of your interest. When sending via email, be sure to include the title of the position in your email subject, along with "Thank You". If typing in formal letter, be sure to use standard letter formatting.

Example Thank-You Note:

Dear Mr/Ms. Last Name:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss the editorial position at Franklin Publishing with me. After meeting with you and observing the company's operations, I am further convinced that my background and skills complement your needs.

I really appreciate that you took so much time to acquaint me with the company, as well as our discussion of how the Harry Potter phenomenon has affected the publishing industry. I enjoyed my visit and I feel I could learn a great deal from you, as well as contribute to the work you're doing.

I look forward to hearing from you. Again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Additional Interview Questions

1. Why do you want to work for us specifically? Who else are you interviewing with?
2. What are your short and long-range goals? How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
3. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.
4. Describe how you dealt with a major challenge in your life. What was the outcome?
5. Describe a mistake you made and how you learned from it.
6. Why did you choose to attend Carleton?
7. Why did you choose your major?
8. Why did you choose this career path?
9. In what ways can you make a contribution to our organization?
10. Tell me about one of your greatest accomplishments.
11. If you were hiring a candidate for this position, what qualities would you seek?
12. What academic subjects did you like best/least? Why?
13. What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?
14. Provide an example of your ability to work under pressure.
15. What do you know about our organization?
16. Tell me about a time that you had a conflict with a supervisor or coworker and how you resolved it.