

# Interview Success Strategies

## For Alumni

The purpose of an interview is to determine whether you are right for the job and whether the job is right for you. The job interview is a two-way conversation between you and a prospective employer.

### Your Interview Goals

- Demonstrate how your experience, knowledge, and capabilities match with the organization.
- Connect to the employer with enthusiasm and convince them that you are the right “fit” for the opportunity.
- Gather information that will help you decide if you really want this position. Remember – you are interviewing them as well!

### Employer’s Interview Goals

- They are wondering if you can do the job, and if you have the necessary skills.
- Most importantly, employers are seeking a candidate with a personality that fits the job and the team. They want to know if you are honest, open-minded, flexible, tolerant, and a team-player.
- To ensure longevity at their organization, they need to be convinced that you really want to work there, and that you will stay!
- **7 key competencies employers have identified as necessary for workplace success:**  
*The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)*
  - Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
  - Oral/Written Communications
  - Teamwork/Collaboration
  - Information Technology Application
  - Leadership
  - Professionalism/Work Ethic
  - Career Management

### Important Evaluation Criteria

Your success or failure in an interview can depend on your appearance, and the interviewer’s first impression of you. Research indicates that, on average, an interviewer decides to hire in just 5 minutes.

- **Appearance:** Dress appropriately & professionally for the interview (for example, please wear things like slacks, a dress, a skirt, a suit, and closed toed shoes). Be sure that you look neat, clean and well-groomed.
- **Punctuality:** Arrive 10 minutes early to allow yourself time to park and collect your thoughts.
- **Greeting/Introduction:** Greet each person with respect and professionalism. When you shake hands, make eye contact and smile. Handshakes should be firm but not aggressive.
- **Body Language:** Be aware of your posture and use of hands while speaking.
- **Attitude:** Convey enthusiasm, sincerity, and positivity. \*NOTE: Please refrain from using negative language or speaking badly about another individual.
- **Responses to the Interview Questions:** Do your research to prepare and then practice, practice, practice!
- **Oral Communication:** Speak clearly and concisely. It is better to take a few moments to consider your answer than to stumble through a poor answer.

## Interview Settings & Types

**PHONE & VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS:** Many employers conduct initial screening interviews (or final interviews with long-distance candidates) via telephone or video conferencing software such as Skype and Zoom.

**TRADITIONAL:** The interviewer typically asks questions and speaks about 25% of the time and the interviewee answers the questions and speaks 75% of the time.

**CONVERSATIONAL:** This interview style has more back & forth. Prepare for this type of interview by having five to ten points you want to make about your skills and how you can contribute to the company, and then relax and speak conversationally.

## Preparing Yourself for the Interview

### **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

**Know Yourself:** The interview is a reflective experience where you will be asked to share your top qualities, achievements, failures, and career ambitions. Please spend time considering your answers and specific examples that can back up your responses.

**Know the Employer:** You must be familiar with the position and the organization so that you can demonstrate your interest in them! A commonly asked interview question is: “What do you know about our company?” If you are unable to answer this question effectively, employers will see this as a sign of disinterest.

### **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

Stress the positive points about yourself in a confident, factual, and honest manner. It is very helpful to convey enthusiasm about the position and to avoid speaking negatively about yourself or others. There are some tricks to keep in mind:

1. Follow the 30 second – 2 minute rule so that you provide a concise but thorough answer.
2. Use specific examples in each question to highlight key skills, past performance, and details about the company.
3. You can pause before (or during) your answer to a question. One trick is to say: “That is a good question. Do you mind if I take a moment to think about that?”
4. Thank the interviewers for their time and ask for business cards or email addresses for follow-up.

Please remember that you **MUST** come prepared with questions to ask the interviewer. These questions demonstrate your interest in the position. We recommend having 3-6 questions prepared, even if you do not have time to ask them all.

### **FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW**

Always send a well-written thank you letter to each person with whom you interviewed within 24-hours following an interview. It is a professional courtesy and demonstrates your consideration, enthusiasm, and appreciation for the opportunity to interview. This follow up message can be an email or a hand-written note. Continue to follow up and provide prompt information as needed.

## Traditional Interview Questions

Below are commonly asked interview questions and suggestions for how to answer these questions.

### **1. Tell me about yourself.**

Use this question as an opportunity to clarify your abilities and experiences in relation to what the employer is looking for. The goal is to skim the surface of what they are seeking, and provide a general overview of your current/recent positions, education, professional goals & personal interests. Please remember to keep your answer brief (30 seconds – 2 minutes).

### **2. Why do you want to work for our company?**

This question assesses whether you have done research on the company. The more detail you can provide, the better! Employers are looking for you to show enthusiasm about the company and the work you would be doing.

### **3. We have many qualified applicants. Why do you think we should hire you for this position?**

One of the best approaches here is to summarize why you believe that your background, experience, and interest in the job will enable you to handle the work well. Be sure to market yourself and your “fit” by addressing your top strengths and accomplishments.

### **4. What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses?**

This is a good one to prepare for in advance! Provide three strengths and examples of how you use those strengths. The weakness question is usually addressed during interviews for full-time positions. For your weakness, provide an explanation of one area of improvement. You can say, “We all have areas we can improve, and an area of improvement I am working on is \_\_\_\_.” Please spend the majority of your answer addressing how you are working to improve on this area.

### **5. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**

The interviewer is assessing motivation and long-term goals. It is important to have a career vision that is consistent with the job, but you are welcome to demonstrate your possible pursuits in leadership, education, training, etc. However, even if you know you won’t stay long at the job, never admit this in the interview!

## Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavior-based interviews are designed to elicit information about how you have performed in the past because past behavior is a good indicator of how you will function in the future. Strong responses to behavioral interview questions use the STAR or “CAR” technique below.

**C – Challenge** - Describe the situation and the challenge that needed to be overcome.

**A – Action** - What did you do?

**R – Result** - What were the outcomes of your actions?

*\*Bonus: Add what your takeaway was from your experience.*

Remember that it is very important to provide a SPECIFIC example (and not a general one). Here are some sample behavioral interview questions:

1. Give an example of a time when you had to make a difficult decision.
2. Describe a time when other members of your work team disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
3. Give an example of when you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
4. Give an example of a time when you were assigned to a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? What would you have done differently?
5. Describe a situation in which you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control.
6. Describe a particularly stressful time you faced. How did you manage your stress?
7. Have you ever disagreed with a rule or procedure? How did you handle this?
8. Give an example where you pushed yourself to do more than the minimum.
9. Describe a situation where you had to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it?
10. Give an example of an important goal which you set in the past. How did you reach it?
11. Give an example of a time when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle the situation?

### Questions to Ask Employers

Remember that you are interviewing the employer! Two key questions you can ask are: “What do you like about working here?” and “How long have you worked here?” Answers to these questions can reveal a lot about a company’s culture. Additional questions you can ask are:

1. How will you and I be working together?
2. What are some examples of the best results produced by people in this job?
3. What areas need the immediate attention of the person you hire?
4. What skills are most valuable in this job?
5. What are your plans for new products or services?
6. How would you define your organization’s management philosophy?
7. What are you looking for in the person who will fill this job?
8. Describe a typical day.
9. What kind of training would I receive?
10. How much input will I have in requesting certain assignments or projects?
11. What activities could I engage in now that might help me on the job if I’m hired?
12. What is the retention rate for people who have been in this position?
13. How important of a role does teamwork play in your company?
14. What opportunities for advancement exist in your company?
15. What makes people want to stay here?
16. How open are managers/supervisors to different viewpoints?
17. Does your company offer a mentoring program?
18. What role does diversity play at this company?
19. What are the next steps in the interview process?