

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

An interview is an opportunity for you to convey to an employer that you have the skills, qualifications, and motivation to perform a job or internship. An interview is also an opportunity for you to determine if you are interested in the position, the organization, and its mission. An interview gives an employer the opportunity to determine if your skills, training, and personality align well with their position, team, and mission.

There are three main things employers want to determine:

- *Can you do the job?* How have your experiences, education and training prepared you for the work?
- *Will you do the job?* Are you genuinely interested in the role and motivated to do the work?
- *Will you be compatible with the existing team?* How well do your values and work culture preferences align with the organization's? Do your personality and work style characteristics mesh with the team?

INTERVIEW MEDIUMS

- **Phone Interview:** telephone interviews are common *first-round* interviews. Employers seek to screen candidates, confirm their qualifications (determined via career fairs and applications) and their interest in the role.
- **In-person Interview:** being invited on-site is typically the *second round* of the interview process; it can be the only interview as well. Conversations are face-to-face at a specific location, sometimes one-on-one but often with multiple potential team members and managers/leaders.
- **Virtual Interview:** an interview using video conferencing software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Cisco WebEx, and more can be a first- or second-round interview. Some employers use asynchronous video interviews for screening: you must record your answers to pre-recorded questions, with no live interaction with an interviewer.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Research:** Spend time looking up information on the organization and the position. Review the website, social media (especially LinkedIn). Talk with people in your network to familiarize yourself with the organization; alumni can be found on LinkedIn and Winthrop Connect. Browse the Internet for recent news stories or other information of note. Explore [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) or [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com) for more information on organizations and typical interview questions. Things to consider in your research:
 - Locations (main office/headquarters, other sites including non-U.S. operations)
 - Size, including the number of employees at various locations
 - Services or products, including new products and projects
 - Competitors within the industry
 - Growth pattern, Reputation, Sales / Assets / Earnings
 - Divisions and subsidiaries

- **Practice:** Interviewing is a skill you can build! Preparation is key. Practice answering general interview questions. You can do this by looking up general interview questions in your industry of interest, use the Big Interview online resource to practice virtually, or make a mock interview appointment with a career coach through Handshake. The point of practicing is not to know every question that is going to be asked in the interview, but to become more comfortable answering diverse types of questions.
 - Ask a friend or family member for help and give them the list of sample questions. Ask them to evaluate you on things like your tone, speed of speech, eye contact, body language, and if any nervous habits appeared while answering questions.
 - Schedule an appointment for 'Interviewing Preparation' or 'Mock Interview' with a member of the CDI team.
 - Utilize Big Interview, Winthrop's online mock interview platform that combines training and practice to help improve interview skills and build confidence.
- **Draft Questions:** The end of the interview is your opportunity to ask the interviewer questions about the position and the organization. The research you conduct ahead of time can inform some of the questions you could ask. Not asking questions at the end of your interview could come across as being disinterested in the position, so be sure to draft up to 3-5 questions ahead of time.
- **Confirm Details:** Make sure to confirm the time, location, and platform the interview will be held. If the interview is virtual, be sure to test the technology ahead of time to minimize the chances of any technical difficulties. There may be multiple rounds of interviews with different teams. Make sure to clarify the format and ask whom you will be interviewing with ahead of time.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Arrive Ahead of Time:** It is recommended to show up 10 minutes early for an in-person interview and 2-5 minutes early for a virtual interview.
- **Bring your Materials:** Have a few copies of your resume, your portfolio, and a notepad to take notes.
- **Eliminate Distractions:** Turn off or silence electronic devices such as cell phones and smartwatches to prevent them from going off during the interview.
- **Be Positive and Confident:** Remember, you would not be offered an interview if the employer did not believe you were qualified for the position. Listen to the questions, focus on positive aspects of your experiences, and relate them to the position as much as you can. A wonderful way to do this is by using the **STAR method** to answer questions.
 - Situation: Describe the background, provide context. Where and when?
 - Task: Describe the challenge and expectations. What did you do and why?
 - Action: Elaborate on your specific action. What did you do and how?
 - Result: Explain the results, accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. and give data!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Interview follow-up is important for several reasons. It helps you reinforce your professionalism and communication skills; it keeps your name front of mind with the interviewer; and it demonstrates your interest and enthusiasm to be hired. Common things to do after an interview include:

- Send thank-you notes via email 24-48 hours after the interview. Handwritten notes take a long time in the mail but can be appreciated in certain situations. A note of gratitude to the employer who took the time to interview you is essential.
- Reflect on your experience and take notes on your experience, what you heard and what you learned. Write down anything you want to remember, including people's names! If you realize you have a follow-up question, that could be included in the thank-you note.
- Send any supporting documents or information that were requested during the interview.
- Contact your references to let them know about your interview. Even if you aren't certain whether they will be contacted, put it on their radar; it also gives you the opportunity to potentially talk about the pros and cons of the opportunity with your reference, to help you prepare for what you will do when you receive an offer.
- If invited to connect on social media (i.e., LinkedIn), do it! Not all recruiters will connect with candidates so don't take it as a bad sign if this is not offered.

COMMON QUESTIONS

There are many fundamental questions that get asked in almost all interviews. They are designed to help the interviewer get to know you and your background better. These are the easiest questions to prepare for because *you can expect them*, and they are based on YOU.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose your major? How have your college courses prepared you for the workforce?
- Tell me about one of your accomplishments?
- What is something you've been involved in that you're proud of?
- What are your top three strengths?
- What is an area that you can improve in?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What influenced you to pursue the career you want?
- Why should we hire you?

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Behavioral interview questions are common and considered the most effective by recruiting professionals. A behavioral interview question is when you are asked to describe past behavior(s) for the interviewer to predict or determine your potential for future success. Examples include:

- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to manage multiple competing priorities and projects. How did you go about fulfilling your obligations?
- Describe a time when you had to make a split-second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.

When answering behavioral questions, use the **STAR method** to structure your response.

- **Situation:** Describe the situation you were in or the example's context (e.g., a social work field placement, a data analytics capstone project, a part-time job). You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized. If you were collaborating with others, who and how many? Paint a picture, give details!
- **Task:** What goal were you working toward? What problem or challenge did you need to solve? What were you being asked to do or accomplish?
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to address the situation and task and keep the focus on YOU. What steps did you take and what was your contribution? Be careful that you don't describe only what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what *you* did. Use the word "I", not "we" when describing actions.
- **Result:** Describe the outcome(s) of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results. If the outcome was unexpected or not positive, acknowledge that then focus on what you learned and how you would improve or change approaches in the future.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

When you are invited for an interview, always ask questions to be certain you know what to expect and how to prepare! The most important questions to ask if unclear:

- What is the format and length of the interview?
- With whom will I be interviewing?
- Do you need any additional materials or information from me prior to the interview?
- Confirm telephone and email contact information for the interviewer, particularly in the event of technical difficulties for a planned video interview.
- If travel is involved, ask if the interview travel expenses will be reimbursed and if so, what documentation you need to provide.

Screening Interview

- Brief (15-30 minutes), typically conducted by an HR or recruiting professional over telephone or video. Screening interviews are used to confirm whether you are still interested in the opportunity, and you're likely to be asked to answer fundamental questions about your background and what motivated you to apply. You may be presented with information such as the maximum salary or a change in the job description, so you can consider whether you'd like to continue or withdraw from consideration.

First Round or Initial Interview

- The first interview may be with a recruiter or a manager/supervisor. While formats can vary, these are typically 30-60 minutes and provide the employer with the opportunity to get to know more about the skills and experiences listed in your application materials. Preparing for Common Questions and Behavioral Interview Questions that relate to the job description is most important.

Second Round, On-site, Team Interviews

- For most professional positions and many internships, it is common to have at least two rounds of interviews. In a second or third round, you are typically interviewing directly with the manager or supervisor of the position, meeting potential colleagues and teammates, and touring the office where you would be working. You may be asked to deliver a presentation, perform a technical task, or participate in a case study. The type of interview experience you have will be influenced by the industry and the role. It is critically important to research what to expect in your field or discipline.

Case Interview

- A case interview is a type of job interview in which you must analyze and solve a particular business/work scenario (“case study”). It is used to simulate an on-the-job situation to learn more about your analytical and communications skills.
- Case interviews are highly interactive; you will be provided not only with a scenario but with data and ambiguous information. Rather than dive into answering the main question, it is important that you ask questions, gather more information, articulate your thought process and approaches to the interviewer.
- The interviewer is looking for an analytical and creative thought process, and there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer. It will be essential for you to process the scenario aloud so the interviewer can understand your thought process in solving the problem.
- Utilize case interview preparation guides and materials, such as those found on Vault.com, to practice and prepare.
- *Sample Case Interview Questions:*
 - A chef and business partner are setting up a new restaurant; they are exploring restroom facilities design, specifically the options for customers to dry their hands. Initial research suggests three options: paper towels, roller towels, and hot air dryers. They need to decide today. What should they consider in their decision-making process?
 - Volvo claims it is the safest car in the world because fewer people die in a Volvo than in a car made by any other manufacturer in the world. What's wrong with this conclusion?

Technical Interviews

- Technical interviews are common for employers recruiting for STEM fields (e.g., engineering, IT, science, or software). It is an interview to assess your technical ability for the role, and the depth and breadth of your knowledge in your chosen field.
- Technical interviews are designed to assess your problem-solving skills, communication skills, and ability to think under pressure. As with case interviews, *the process* is important. How you go about solving a given challenge is of interest to employers; it gives them a glimpse into how you would solve a real problem at work.
- *Technical Phone Interview:* There may be a technical component to a phone interview. For coding positions, you may be asked to type answers into a Google Doc or collaborate on a shared editor.

- *Technical On-site Interview:* You may have to answer questions related to knowledge about a particular topic, process, or product. You may be asked to outline a solution to a problem on a whiteboard or to deliver a presentation. For coding interviews, be prepared to write code on a whiteboard, on a company-provided computer, or engage in a pair programmer assignment.

Panel Interviews

- A panel interview is when two or more people interview you at the same time. Panel members can include potential managers, team members, HR specialists, and other decision-makers.
- It is important to make eye contact with and speak to all participants. Do not speak exclusively to the person who asks a question or to the person with the highest title/seniority in the room.
- When you know in advance who is on the panel, you will want to look them up by title and role. This will help you anticipate their potential questions and tailor them according to who is in the room.
- Treat it as a conversation – how do you interact and mesh with a team? It is not an inquisition!

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING AN INTERVIEW

A job interview should be a two-way conversation. Interviewers expect you to ask questions! Asking thoughtful questions will: polish your image by showing you have researched the organization; demonstrate your curiosity and that you are interested in the role; help you evaluate how the job and the organization fit into your goals. When preparing, your first stop should be the organization's website; don't ask questions that are covered online. Review the job posting. Pay close attention to details that become known during the interview; ask follow-up questions about information you learned throughout the process.

Examples of questions to ask:

- What does a typical workday look like? What is a typical week like in this job?
- What are the challenges facing the person in this position?
- What are your expectations for the first 90 days/the first year for this role?
- What is your supervisory and leadership style?
- How would you describe the organizational culture?
- What is the natural career progression for employees with my skill sets?
- Does the organization have a formal mentoring or coaching program? How is it structured?
- What kind of internal and external training (professional development opportunities) do you provide?
- What do you most enjoy about working with this organization?

Finally, always ask questions to confirm what's next:

- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- When do you anticipate making your decision?
- May I follow up with you if I have additional questions? What is the best time and method (phone, email) to follow up with you?