

There's a lot riding on your first impression

Scary Thought: Decisions tend to be made within the first five minutes. The hiring manager then spends the next half-hour defending and supporting their decision.

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minutes?!?!? That puts a lot of pressure on you to give the right impression when you first arrive to your interview, even before you speak. Being on time, being dressed appropriately, and being prepared are SO CRITICAL. It is incredibly difficult and takes a lot of extra work to 'bounce back' from a negative first impression. Your interview will be nerve-racking enough without having to take those extra steps trying to make up for a negative impression.

Not that you need more pressure.....

But think of everything you do or say (on the day of the interview) as a test that you are trying to pass – what time you show up, how completely and neatly you fill out the application, the pace at which you walk on the way to the interview room, your sitting posture, handshake, and appearance.

Remember: *80% of the hire will be based on personality with only 20% based on your skills.* It is much easier to teach someone specific skills than it is to teach them how to get along with other people or how to make a good impression.

Biggest Interview Mistake? SHOW UP LATE!

The worst mistake an individual can make at an interview is being late. Being 'fashionably late' may work when you are meeting your friends out or showing up at a party, but it will kill an interview before it starts.

** It doesn't matter how bad traffic was that morning – there is NO EXCUSE for being late. PERIOD.

What to do **BEFORE** the Interview



Research the company

It's frustrating for an interviewer to have someone in front of them who does not know about the company or the position they are applying for. In addition to impressing the interviewer, you should want to know about the company to make sure this will be a good fit for you. Know *why* you want to work for this particular company. If you don't know, how can you convince the interviewer that you are a good candidate?

Where can you find information about the company?

- **Look up the company's website.** This includes a great deal of information about the company as it wants to be seen by the public. Check out the annual report, the mission statement, the organizational structure, and any "press room" or "company news" links.
- **News sources.** Do some research to see what general interest and business publications and websites are writing about the employer and its industry. You can search national publication for news on major corporations or hometown newspapers to learn about small businesses and how they interact with their communities.
- **Talk to people who work or have worked there** (not just the recruiter or H.R. rep). Educate yourself so that you will understand what the interviewer is talking about – by understanding the company, their culture and objectives, you can avoid asking obvious questions.



Be on time

As stated above, being punctual is extremely important to creating a positive first impression. Plan on arriving to the interview location 15 minutes early. It shows respect for the interviewer's time.

Ways to avoid being late:

- Drive to the interview location the day before to make sure you know how to get there and can estimate more accurately how long it will take you to get there.
- Ask ahead of time about parking.
- Ask about access to the location of the interview – some buildings require special clearance, passes, etc. to get through doors or into certain areas of the building.

Dress professionally

It shows that you care enough about the interview and the company to present yourself in a professional manner.

Many offices have adopted a more casual dress code than in previous years. **Remember:** The dress code may be “business casual”, but an interview dress code is always “business formal.” It is better to look more dressed up than the average employee working that day than to run the risk of looking underdressed.



Dress for Success Tips (think conservative)



Men

- Suits are best – dark colored, conservative tie, white shirt, and appropriate dress shoes
- Shined shoes – believe it or not, your shoes say a lot about you
- No tattoos showing
- No facial piercings
- No jewelry – wedding ring or one ring on a hand can be appropriate, watches are okay
- Limit earrings to one per ear – preferably none
- No facial hair is best, but if you refuse to shave it off, make sure it is neatly trimmed and is not an unnatural color
- Limit the amount of cologne you put on that day

Women

- Suits are best – dark colored, skirts (no more than 3 inches above your knee) are preferred over pants, white shirt, pantyhose (even in the summer). Check any slits in your skirts, especially those in the back, to ensure they are not too revealing.
- Shoes – no sandals or stilettos
- No cleavage! Also, make sure any button-up shirts fit properly and do not gap between the buttons.
- No tattoos showing or facial piercings
- Limit jewelry – one ring per hand, one earring per ear, smaller necklaces and/or bracelets
- Limit use of makeup – use natural, neutral tones to look professional (i.e. use a light natural shade of lipstick)
- Limit amount of perfume
- Neatly trimmed and appropriately colored nails – clear is best, NO extremely long nails
- Purse should be conservative and inconspicuous
- Hair should be neatly cut, styled, and of a natural color

** Conservative colors in various shades of blue or gray are considered best**

Practice, practice, then practice some more

There is no such thing as over-prepared! Be sure to go back over your resume to make sure you are completely familiar with what is on it and you able to explain what is included. If you are well-rehearsed, you will feel more confident going into the interview and more relaxed during the interview; both of which will increase your chances of doing a great job!

- Set up a time to do an **individual mock interview** with the Career Services staff.
- Come to **Mock Interview Evening** put on by Career Services each semester.
- Ask a friend to go over possible questions and responses with you ahead of time.

While there is no way of knowing exactly what questions will be asked, it is still beneficial to practice responses to a few commonly asked questions.

Interview questions can be divided into two types: **Conventional** and **Behavioral**. The purpose behind each of these questions lies in what the responses tell the interviewer. The information will be very different based on the type of question.

Conventional

- 'Will do' – more theoretical/hypothetical
- Future focused
- Focuses on attitudes
- Knowledge-oriented

Behavioral

- 'Have done' – concrete examples from past
- Past focused
- Focuses on actions
- Behavior-oriented

Sample Conventional Interview Questions

- What can you tell me about our organization? Why do you want to work here?
- Why did you choose to pursue a career in _____?
- What strengths would you bring to this position?
- How would your favorite professor describe you? Your last roommate?
- What qualities do you think a successful manager must possess?
- What did you like best/least about your last job? Why?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- What college courses did you like best/least? Why?
- What is your ideal work environment?
- Use 3 words/phrases to describe yourself?
- How have your education and experience prepared you for this position?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment? What have you learned from it?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- What has been your greatest failure? What did you learn from it?
- Why should I hire you?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Behavioral Interviewing

More and more interviewers are utilizing 'behavioral interviewing' techniques to determine whether individuals are a good fit for the company and if they will do a good job in the future. Behavior based interviewing focuses on specific examples from your past that demonstrate the skills and qualifications necessary to succeed within the organization you are interviewing with. Try to use examples from different areas of your life (school, sports, clubs, work, etc.) Why focus on the past? **Past behavior/performance is the BEST predictor of future behavior/performance.**

How do I prepare for these questions?

The best way to prepare for these questions is to come up with 6-7 examples of specific instances when you demonstrated skills required/likely to be used in the position you are interviewing for. A good way to format your responses is by using the **STAR** method. This method ensures that you are thoroughly and adequately answering the question while maintaining focus and purpose.

STAR method

S (Situation) OR	Describe the situation in which you demonstrated the skill
T (Task)	Describe the task you were asked to accomplish which required the use of this particular skill
A (Action)	Describe the action you took to change the situation/complete the task
R (Result/Resolution)	Describe the result of the action you took/what you learned/what was the outcome

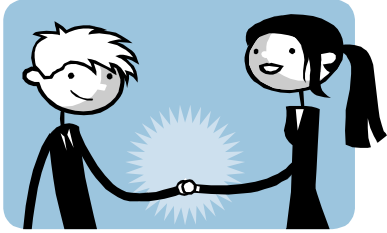
Your response will sound similar to a story with a beginning, middle, and an end.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give me an example when you had to make a split second decision.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you have made in the last year.
- Describe a situation where you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with an upset co-worker or customer.
- Describe a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

**Use this as another opportunity to highlight why you would be the best candidate for this company. Keep your responses concise, well-thought out, and specific. Always end on a positive note!

What to do DURING the Interview



Be aware of your BODY LANGUAGE

Most communication is at the nonverbal level. Your body language will say more than your words could hope to!

Key Signals to Monitor

Handshake: Give the interviewer a firm handshake. Nobody likes a limp handshake, but at the same time, it is not a contest of strength! While shaking, introduce yourself and make eye contact the entire time.

Smile: Nothing is worse than interviewing an individual who looks depressed or indifferent. You want to convey to the interviewer that you are happy to be there and are excited at the prospect of working for this company.

Maintain eye contact at all times: In American culture, eye contact shows that you are confident about yourself and your capabilities. Convey this to your interviewer. Don't stare out the window or look around the room. The interviewer is trying to carry on a conversation so BE ATTENTIVE.

Speak clearly: Speak in an appropriate tone of voice and at a reasonable volume. Do not mumble because it indicates a lack of confidence.

Respond to your interviewer: Smile at appropriate times. Acknowledge when they attempt to be funny or are being serious.

Listen before you answer questions: Responding too quickly and without thinking suggests that you are impulsive or do not care enough to give a thoughtful response.



Ask Questions about the Organization/Position

- Can you tell me about the orientation/training process?
- Would you describe a typical workday and the specific duties I would complete?
- Why did you start working here?
- What qualities make people successful in this organization?
- How is this job important to the whole organization?
- What are the department's goals for the year?

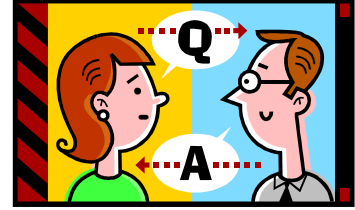
What do you not ask about?

DO NOT ask about salary, benefits, or vacation days during the interview UNLESS the interviewer brings it up or asks you about this. This is typically second interview discussion.

Know which Questions to NOT Answer

If you choose, you may offer any information you want to, if you think it is in your best interest to do so. However, it is illegal for prospective employers to ask questions in the “not required” column.

	These questions are legal.....	You are NOT required to answer these.....
Birthplace/Citizenship	“If hired, can you show evidence of being legally allowed to work in the US?”	“Where were you born?” “What is your mother tongue?”
Sex/Family Status	May ask for name and address of parent, if candidate is a minor.	“With whom do you live?” or any questions which would indicate whether the candidate is male or female.
Race	Almost nothing is legal until after the candidate is hired.	“What is your racial/ethnic group?” or anything dealing with color.
Age	May verify that candidate meets minimum requirement such as “Are you 18 or older?”	“How old are you?” or “When did you finish high school?”
Military Service	May ask about job-related skills acquired during service.	Questions dealing with dates of military service and type of discharge.
Names	“To help check prior employer, list any names used.”	“What was your maiden name?”
National Origin	“These positions require language skills. What languages do you speak?”	“How did you acquire your language skills?” “What did your family speak?”
Physical Characteristics	May require a photo only after hiring.	“Please submit a recent photo with your application.”
Religion	May tell the candidate the hours they will be required to work.	“Do you belong to a church?” “What is your religion?”
Criminal Record	“You will not be barred from employment on the basis of your answer, but have you ever been convicted of a felony?”	“Have you ever been arrested?” or “Have you ever been in trouble with the law?”
Physical Condition	“If hired, you will have to pass a physical based on actual job requirements.”	“What is your physical condition?” “Do you have any disabilities?”



Respond to Questions Appropriately

Give brief answers: Answer promptly and intelligently. Make them as concise as possible, however try to elaborate beyond a 'yes' or 'no' response.

Be prepared for an 'off the wall' question: It may seem unusual, but some recruiters/interviewers will throw in a question that does not relate to any aspect of the job. For example, "What ocean animal do you feel most closely resembles your skills and abilities? Why?"

Sound weird? That's the point. The interviewer is trying to determine whether you are able to 'think on your feet' or if you are the type to get 'thrown off' easily. Since there is an infinite amount of questions like these that can be asked, it is nearly impossible to be ready for these. Just remember to do the following:

Take a breath, stop for a second, and form a response before speaking. It is NOT going to be okay to look frightened/surprised or to blurt out the first thing that pops in your head.

Show your interest in this position

If you are extremely interested in this position, let the interviewer know this. Tell him/her how interested you are in the position and what a great job you would do for the organization. This is where your body language and willingness to ask questions will come in handy.

Ask about the next step in the application process

Ask the interviewer how long their application process takes so you have an idea of how long you could be waiting for a response. You may be required to complete more paperwork, submit further information, or go through a second round of interviews. It's good for you to know this and it will further suggest that you are interested in working there.

What if I am offered a position during the interview?

Remember one thing: Any **decision you make right then is impulsive and could be regretted later.** It is completely acceptable (and typical) to ask for a specified amount of time (1-2 weeks is standard) to consider your options before accepting or declining an offer. Weigh out the pros and cons of each job offer before making your decision.

What to do AFTER the Interview



Thank the Interviewer IN WRITING

There is only one thing to remember to do AFTER the interview is over. **SEND A THANK YOU NOTE/CARD!!!** It is the one ‘must’ of interview etiquette.

After your interview (but NO longer than 2 days), type a letter or card thanking the interviewer for their time and consideration. This is a great opportunity to remind the interviewer of which candidate you are, reassert your interest in the position, and highlight further what a good match you are for this position.

What goes in a “Thank You” Letter?

Your thank you note should accomplish the following:

- Thank the person for the opportunity to interview with the company.
- Recap some of the conversational highlights.
- Clarify any information you needed to check on for the interviewer.
- Plug your skills. Use the last paragraph as a chance to state, “This job is a good fit for me because of XYZ, and my past experience in LMN.”

Only a small percentage of applicants remember to send ‘thank you’ letters/cards to their interviewers, so this is a GREAT CHANCE to stand out from the rest of the individuals who interviewed for the same position. Take any opportunity you can to remind the interviewer of your name and of your qualifications.

What about e-mail thank you notes?

If you have corresponded with people at the company previously (leading up to the interview), then go ahead and send an e-mail thank you when you get home from the interview. **However, it’s a nice touch to also send a separate handwritten note via “snail mail”.** Handwritten notes convey a sense of thoughtfulness and may set you apart from other candidates.

Now that you are familiar and more confident about what to do throughout the interview process, let's go over a list of behaviors that you should NOT engage in. The following behaviors can be viewed by many interviewers as inappropriate or can simply give the interviewer a negative impression of you. A good rule: Just don't do them.

The “Don't-even-think-about-it's”

1. Chew Gum: It's distracting and tacky. It is not even recommended to chew gum *before* the interview because you may forget to take it out. Eat a mint before you go in.

2. Smoke: Don't smoke during an interview even if the interviewer smokes and offers you one. Nor is it a good idea to smoke before going into your interview. Even if you try to cover it up with perfume and mints, non-smokers can still smell it. Keep in mind: others can have bad reactions to cigarette smoke or can get offended by this.

3. Use Inappropriate language: You want to portray yourself as intelligent, educated, and mature. Engaging in 'dirty' jokes or using foul language will not give that impression of you during a job interview.

4. Talk bad about your former supervisor or co-workers: Coming across as a 'gossip' will not give your interviewer the best impression of you. Additionally, they will not want to hire anyone who shows that they might speak negatively about co-workers or supervisors who work at the organization where you are interviewing.

5. Lie: DON'T LIE during a job interview. It will get figured out! If not during the interview, then shortly after. Both of which will make you look bad. If you are asked about something you are not familiar with, it is better to be honest. Admit that you are unfamiliar with it, but would be willing/excited to learn. If you say yes, most interviewers will then ask follow up questions to determine how much you really do know.