INTERVIEWING

Getting ready for your interview can be stressful, whether for an internship or a job. Being prepared is the best way to combat any anxiety you might feel – and to get the results you want!

Part of being prepared and critical to your success is to gain experience interviewing so that you are comfortable with the interview process. The Career Services staff is here to help you gain that experience. We urge you to read this guide and to schedule a mock interview with us. The mock interview will provide you with the interview experience and helpful tips so you can be relaxed and confident in your interview.

PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW

Your professional resume and cover letter have opened the door for you to be invited for an interview. The main purpose of the interview is to allow the interviewer to assess your interpersonal and communication skills and how you will “fit” with the organization. Being articulate, enthusiastic, confident and prepared are key elements of a good interview. The interview is your opportunity to sell yourself verbally and interpersonally as the candidate best qualified for the position.

The interview is used by the candidate to:
- demonstrate strong communication and interpersonal skills
- expand upon information provided in your resume or provide additional information i.e. offer a more complete picture of your skills and experiences
- gather additional information about the organization with which you are interviewing
- get a better understanding of the organization and the position to determine whether it would be a good match for your skills and interests
- confirm whether or not the organization and position for which you are interviewing is a good “fit” for you

The employer uses the interview to:
- gage your ability to communicate and interact appropriately
- share additional information about the organization and the position
- gain additional information about your skills, related experience and/or knowledge
- learn about your interest in the organization and the position
- determine whether you would be a good match for the organization

INTERVIEW TYPES

Panel or Group Interview
- Usually more than 3 interviewers; prior to the interview, request the names of interviewers and research their positions within the company
- Bring copies of your resume for everyone in the group
- Respond to the person in the group who asked you the question, but make eye contact with the rest of the group
- If you have contact information for everyone in the interview, follow up with each individual. If not, send a thank you note to the person who arranged the interview.
Phone Interview
Phone interviews are typically used early in the interview process or when someone is in a different location. Prepare for a phone interview as well as you would prepare for an in-person interview by going over your resume, preparing a list of questions, and having information about the employer and the job at your fingertips.

- Confirm how many people and who, including their positions, will be participating in the phone interview.
- Make sure your voicemail has a professional-sounding message – no ring back tones, obnoxious messages, etc.
- Take the call in a comfortable, quiet place where you will not be interrupted or distracted. Simpson has interview rooms in the Kent Campus Center that would be an ideal spot to do this.
- Have all of your materials on yourself and the employer open and available on your desk.
- Telephone interviews tend to be shorter than in-person interviews, so don't waste time – be concise with your responses and questions.
- Have paper and a pen ready and take notes during the conversation. These notes will help you recall the details of the conversation and alert you to a question you want to ask or an additional comment you want to make at a later time during the interview.
- Send a thank you note to each interviewer after the phone interview as well.

Skype Interview
With companies slashing many expenses these days, they may want to eliminate the costs associated with flying and hotel rooms for candidates. Many now prefer to interview job candidates online using applications such as Skype. You should treat a Skype Interview just as you would a face-to-face interview.

- Prepare for the interview in an advance, just as you would prepare for any interview.
- If possible, test out your computer set-up days before and a few hours before the interview will take place. If possible, use an Ethernet cable to access the web.
- Make sure there is plenty of lighting in the room, so that the hiring manager can clearly see your face. A desk lamp or window in front of you is a good idea.
- Free the room of any unnecessary distractions (Posters, pictures, decorations), particularly behind you.
- Test the call with a friend so you can make minor adjustments and that everything is set up appropriately for the interview.
- Dress as you would for a normal interview.
- Turn off sound notifications on your e-mail or other applications, as well as on your mobile phone.
- Sit at a slight angle when interviewing for a more comfortable less ‘mug-shot’ view.
- Try to look into the camera rather than the screen when listening to the interviewer and responding to questions. Perhaps tape a picture of a friend next to the camera for something to look at. This will feel as though there is actual eye contact!
- Smile! Your facial expression will communicate confidence and a positive attitude.
- Log onto Skype approximately 15 minutes before the interview start time.
- Avoid looking at notes or other distractions during the interview.
- As with a phone interview, the Kent Campus Center Interview rooms are an ideal location for a Skype Interview.

Interviewing over a Meal
Some employers choose to interview job candidates over a meal, particularly if you are interviewing for a position out of town.

- Brush up on dining etiquette – know and practice what utensils to use, what to do with your hands and personal items, the best foods to order for a mess-free meal, etc.
- Dress as instructed or in business attire.
- Be punctual and arrive a few minutes before the designated time.
- Give the interviewer's name to the host or hostess.
- Stand until your interviewer and others in your party are seated.
- Stay away from anything that is difficult to eat neatly or that will likely leave particles in your teeth.
• Avoid alcoholic beverages, stick with water or tea.
• Order a moderately priced item.
• Wait to begin eating until everyone at the table has been served.
• Ask if you can pour water for anyone else or pass the breadbasket around the table before you partake.
• Chew and swallow completely before answering a question.
• Follow the interviewer’s lead. If they put their napkin on the table it means the meal is over. Place your napkin on the table also.
• When your interviewer stands, thank them for their time and for the meal.

Informational Interview
An informational interview is a conversation with an individual who is currently employed in a field or organization you wish to consider. By interviewing people in a career field or organization you are curious about, you can learn first-hand about the pros and cons associated with that choice.
• Conduct informational interviews before you begin your job/internship search.
• Use networking connections to set up interviews or contact Simpson Career Services.
• The Informational Interview usually lasts 20-30 minutes; be respectful of the professional’s time.
• Prepare questions you wish to ask.
  o How did you choose this field/organization?
  o What is the most satisfying (or frustrating) part of your job?
  o What helped prepare you for this position?
  o How would you describe the work experience?
  o What do you do in a typical day/week?
  o What is an entry-level salary range for a position’s like this? (Don’t ask what they make!)
  o What advice do you have for someone interested in the field?
  o Is there anyone else I should talk to about this field/career?
• Send a thank you note after the interview and keep that person updated about your career search process.
• Assess the information and decide if this is a career you are interested in pursuing.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

• Research and analyze the position. Know what you are applying for and how your qualifications fit the job. Review the job description thoroughly.
• Research the employer. Know what the company/organization values and if you value the same thing. Learn about their mission, services, products, company locations, future prospects, and recent news about the company or field.
  o Check the “About Us” or “News” or “Press” section on the company website for information
• Review your qualifications. Do your skills match what the employer is looking for? If you are missing something, how can you overcome that?
• Participate in a mock interview. Contact Career Services to set up a time to practice your interviewing skills.
• Prepare answers to common interview questions. You don’t need to have rehearsed answers, but an idea of what you want to say or examples to use will be very helpful.
• Practice saying your responses out loud to interview questions. Answering potential questions in front of a mirror can be useful for assessing your facial expressions.
• Ask a friend or family member to pretend they are an employer, ask you a list of questions, and give you feedback.
• Video or audio tape your responses and review your performance. Ask yourself: how can I improve, did I look/sound relaxed, and did I sound enthusiastic?
COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- What’s your elevator speech?
- Why are you the best person for the job?
- Why are you interested in this field?
- What challenges have you faced successfully?
- In what ways did you and your (supervisor) work well together in your last position?
- What makes you a person who works well with customers/clients?
- What makes you a person who works well with your co-workers?
- Where do you want to be in 5 years and in 10 years?
- What motivates you?
- What strengths do you bring to this position?
- In what ways have you shown that you go the extra mile?
- What experience for the job are you lacking and why would it not be a problem?
- If you are going to be managing people, how do you motivate others?
- Why are you interested in our organization?
- Where do you see yourself fitting in?
- What do you know about our services/products?
- How do you feel about traveling or relocating as part of your job?
- In what type of work setting do you do your best work?
- Why should we hire you?
- Do you have any questions for us?

BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral interviewing is popular with many employers and something you must prepare for. It is based on the premise that past behavior best predicts future behavior. For example, if you have shown initiative while volunteering, in your work, and/or in a club or class project, the belief is that you are likely to show initiative when you are working for the employer that is interviewing you. Before an interview, each position is assessed by the employer for the skills and characteristics that relate to job success.

You should respond to behavioral interview questions by giving a specific example where you have already demonstrated the skill that the interviewer is looking for. You may find it helpful to remember the mnemonic STAR in composing a concise and thoughtful response to an interviewer’s question. Here’s how it works:

- **Situation or Task** – What was the situation in which you exercised a desired skill or strength? What was the problem, need or concern? Include obstacles you had to overcome.

- **Action** - What steps did you take to correct the problem? How did you create a new program/product/service that met a need?

- **Results** – Describe the results and positive benefits you achieved. Quantify the results and relate your skills, action and results to the employer’s needs when possible.

Before the interview, prepare a few illustrative examples of problems you have solved. For each, outline the main steps involved in solving the problem, the alternatives you considered, and the results you obtained. When you prepared, you will be able to quickly think and effectively describe the examples that best fit the questions asked.
PREPARING YOUR OWN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

It is always good to have a few questions for your interviewer(s) at the end of your interview. Your research on the company will help you come up with questions too. You’ll want to have a few prepared in case they answer them during the interview. Listen attentively throughout the interview and you may come up with a few more as well.

By asking employers thoughtful questions, you have the opportunity to demonstrate your interest in working for their organization. Also, if given an offer, you will be more able to make an intelligent decision about whether or not to accept. Examples include…

- When and how are employees evaluated?
- What are the best/worst aspects of working in this organization?
- What’s the biggest challenge facing this group/organization right now?
- How would you compare your organization with your major competitors? What are your plans for expansion in terms of product lines, services, new branches, etc.?
- How would you describe the management style in this organization? How are decisions made?
- What are some typical first-year assignments? What is the career path for my position? How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- What kind of training is given to new employees?
- Do you have any concerns about my background that I can answer now?
- How would you describe the responsibilities of the position?
- How would you describe a typical week/day in this position?
- What is the company's management style?
- Who does this position report to? If I am offered the position, can I meet him/her?
- How many people work in this office/department?
- How much travel is expected?
- Is relocation a possibility?
- What is the typical work week? Is overtime expected?
- What are the prospects for growth and advancement?
- If I am offered the position, when would you want me to start?

Questions NOT to Ask:

- What does this company do? (Do your research ahead of time!)
- If I get the job when can I take time off for vacation? (Wait until you get the offer to mention prior commitments)
- Can I change my schedule if I get the job? (If you need to figure out the logistics of getting to work don't mention it now...)
- What is my salary? (Wait until after the offer is made.)
INTERVIEW TIPS

- Dress professionally.
- Express your genuine interest by responding to questions thoughtfully and appropriately.
- Listen carefully by focusing and giving your full attention to the interviewer and the question being asked.
- Be specific and give examples. This adds credibility to statements you make about your qualifications. It is better to make a few strong points than many brief, unrelated points.
- Organize your thoughts, understand issues and communicate. The employer may not necessarily be looking for the right response to a question but is analyzing how you respond.
- It’s OK to pause to collect your thoughts and if need be, ask for clarification. Avoid “uh,” “like,” and “you know!”
- Do not diminish your past experiences; don’t say, “I was just a cashier.”
- An apparent challenge to your qualifications may not be a rejection, but rather a call for more information.
- Be clear and concise when responding to questions; your response should be thorough but no more than two minutes long!

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Transportation

- Know where you are going! Plan your route and leave plenty of time for any issues that may come up.
- Clean your car – inside and out! If an employer walks you to your car, you want that to leave a good impression as well.

Image

- Don’t be late or too early. 5-10 minutes early is a good arrival time
- Be confident and have a positive attitude
- Maintain eye contact, use a clear voice, and have a firm handshake
- Dress for success! See the section on interview and business attire for more details
- Bring a folder, pad folio, or business-appropriate bag to store belongings. What to bring…
  o Extra Resumes
  o Pen
  o Bottle of water
  o Tissues
  o Leave your phone in the car!

Follow-Up

- Send a thank you note soon after the interview. A handwritten letter is nice, but at least, send an e-mail. This should be done within a day of the interview.
- See the Employment Letter Guide for examples of thank you notes.
- Call the company if you haven’t heard from them in 5-7 days or the allotted time they mentioned
**ACCEPTING THE OFFER**

Congratulations, you’ve got the job offer! Before you accept the offer, be sure to verify all of the job details with the employer. If you have any questions about the job, now is the time to ask for clarification. Don’t forget to inquire about the work schedule and benefits, too.

- Do not take too much time to think about the offer – 2-3 days is appropriate if you have things to consider like relocation, a partner or family member you need to discuss the opportunity with, etc.
- Thank the employer for the job offer and be grateful

**REJECTING THE OFFER**

If you decide to reject a job offer, you may want to let the employer know in writing that you are declining the offer. Your letter should be polite, brief, and to the point.

You don’t want to burn bridges and this employer may have a better offer for you down the road. Even if the hours are awful, the work environment is terrible or the pay isn’t enough to make ends meet, don’t mention it.

You should include a thank you and your appreciation for the offer, along with a written rejection of the job offer. This letter should be addressed to the person who offered you the position and be well written. Even though you are declining a job, you want to make sure all your correspondence is professional.

**DRESS FOR SUCCESS**

Your appearance can make or break a job opportunity. If you’re questioning what to wear to an interview or business event, the most important thing to keep in mind is that you must look professional. When in doubt, dress more conservatively that you think you might need. Identify someone who has experience and/or success in interviewing and the professional environment who can give you honest feedback about your dress and appearance for the interview.

**BUSINESS CASUAL**

Business casual attire is appropriate for most internship’s, jobs, and business related events such as career fairs or employer information sessions. Stick to classic looks and avoid being too trendy. Use common sense and dress to what the situation and/or weather dictates. All items should be clean, well pressed, and in good condition.

**Tips for Men**

- You don’t typically need a tie, but they are appropriate
- Keep to solid colors and avoid wild prints
- Long-sleeved, button down shirts are most appropriate; polo shirts are fine if it is more casual or outdoors
- Khaki or dark pants
- Dark crew socks
- Leather black or brown shoes – No athletic shoes or sandals
- Trimmed facial hair and a clean haircut
- Jewelry should be limited to a watch and conservative items – earrings and other piercings are typically removed
**Tips for Women**

- If you would wear it to a club…don’t wear it to work! Khaki or dark pants or skirts
  - Skirts should come to your knees at least
  - Pants should be mid-rise
- Tailored shirts, blouses, and sweaters are all appropriate
  - Avoid sleeveless shirts in most business environments
- Avoid shiny or glittery fabrics
- Do not show cleavage
- Avoid shiny or glittery fabrics
- Makeup should be natural and conservative including nails
- Black, brown, tan, or navy leather shoes are your best choice
  - Spike heels, strappy sandals, or chunky platforms are not appropriate
- When in doubt, wear nylons with a skirt or dress
- Carry a professional purse or tote bag
- Keep hair style conservative and out of your eyes

**General Tips**

- A padfolio can be helpful to carry any materials you may need
- Leave backpacks and other campus accessories home
- Keep phone use to a minimum in any business casual environment

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### INTERVIEW OR BUSINESS ATTIRE

Your clothes are the first impression when you interview. When you are dressed in appropriate interview or professional business attire, your behavior tends to change to reflect that image. Know your industry and be aware of the expectations in how you present yourself. For example, an accounting firm will likely have more strict standards than a non-profit agency.

**Tips for Men**

- A two-piece suit is the best choice for either men or women
- Navy or dark gray are the safest options – avoid black
- Investing in a good-quality suit will benefit you greatly – you will wear it more than you think!
- Should be clean, well pressed and inspected for tags, threads, etc.
- Dark crew socks
- Leather, lace-up or slip-on shoes either black or cordovan are best. A good pair of shoes will be worth the investment!
- Your belt should match the rest of your clothing and be a conservative style; large and fancy buckles are not appropriate.
- Hair should be clean cut – use your judgment on facial hair and trendy hair styles. If your profession is more conservative, it may be time to cut the college style!
- Jewelry should be limited to a watch and/or wedding ring
- Suits typically have tacking stiches to hold the back slit and sleeves in place – cut them carefully before you interview! Also, the tag on the outside of the sleeve should be removed, as well as any price and brand tags
Tips for Women

- Wear a two-piece matched suit – pants or skirts are both acceptable
  - Skirts should be knee length and cover your thighs when seated
  - Both should be a mid-rise on the waist – no low-cut
- A blouse in a conservative color should be worn under the jacket.
  - Red accessories are fine however, red or bright orange blouses are not recommended.
  - Don’t show cleavage
  - Short-sleeved or long-sleeved are best – do not wear a tank if you will be removing your jacket
- Jewelry should be conservative and limited to a watch, subtle necklace, basic earrings, and limited rings (one per hand max)
- Makeup should be conservative – less is more
- Shoes should be leather or fabric in a closed-toe pump. Make sure that you are able to walk comfortably in your shoes.
- Wear plain, sheer, neutral colored nylons or trouser socks

General Tips

- Be remembered for your interview and not your outfit!
- Even if the employees of the organization dress business casual on a daily basis, dress more formally for the interview
- Interview attire is not social attire. Don’t look like you are going to a party!
- Wear modern, conservative clothes that fit you well
- Jacket and pants should be a matching suit, not slacks and a sport coat
- Be conservative with your tie – solid, stripes, or basic patterns are good choices
- Wear a long-sleeved shirt – white or light blue are the best choices
- Carry a padfolio or business bag