

CAREER & EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION CENTER

Interview Guide



MOUNT ST. JOSEPH
UNIVERSITY

A job interview is a meeting between a potential employer and an applicant in which questions will be asked regarding qualifications to determine if you match the needs of the organization. Your cover letter and resume have opened the door; the interview secures the position.



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General Interview Tips

- **Be honest** - Always be truthful when responding to questions. Watch out for “overinflating” your abilities. Be yourself and focus on your positive qualities. Be able to match your skills and talents to the job description.
- **Be prepared** - Research the company to provide confidence in your knowledge of the employer and the position. Know your strengths and skills as they relate to the position, as well as trends in your career field.
- **Be enthusiastic** - Display appropriate enthusiasm and interest through verbal and non-verbal communication. It is key to develop a good rapport with the interviewer(s). You want them to connect with you.
- **Display a professional image** - Wear business professional attire to the interview. Professional dress demonstrates respect and confidence. Bring several copies of your resume, cover letter and references, printed on professional resume paper, along with a padfolio and pen. Clean up your social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- **Practice, practice and practice again** - Practice describing your skills and experiences and their relevance to the position you are seeking. Practice a 30 second introduction to market yourself, as well as open-ended and behavioral based interview questions. Contact the Career & Experiential Education Center to schedule a mock interview.

Purpose of the Interview

The interview is an opportunity for you and the interviewer to evaluate if the position is a good match.

INTERVIEWER

- *Ask questions regarding your skills and experience*
- *Predict, based upon your past and present experience, whether you would make a good employee*

INTERVIEWEE

- *Display skills and talents that would be useful to the prospective employer*
- *Ask questions about the organization and the position to gain a better understanding of the day-to-day operations and culture*
- *Elaborate on information that is on your resume and showcase qualifications not included on your resume*
- *Evaluate if the position aligns with your career goals*

Types of Interviews

Different types of interviews are used depending on the job position, the interviewer's style, or the company's policies. You may encounter one or more of the following types:

- **Preliminary/Screening interview** - This interview is used to determine if you meet the basic qualifications and to narrow down the candidate pool. Often, this interview is conducted via phone or video call. Typically, it lasts 15 to 30 minutes and a more in-depth interview may follow.
- **Second interview** - Success in the preliminary interview results in a second interview, which is typically an on-site interview. Be prepared to answer more in-depth questions about your experiences, skills and qualifications as it relates to the position and the organization.
- **Formal interview** - This interview has an organized structure including an introduction, a series of in-depth questions, and a closing. Questions follow a progression and are typically developed in advance. This could be with an individual interviewer or a group of interviewers.
- **Informal interview** - This interview is a casual conversation to develop rapport between you and the interviewer(s). You may discuss the weather, hobbies or interests. The interviewer is trying to evaluate your communication and interpersonal skills, attitude, interests, motivation, poise, etc. Dining may also be a part of this type of interview.
- **Multiple interview** - This interview will involve meeting with various individuals from the organization at separate times, typically in one day. The interviewers may include an HR professional, colleagues, hiring manager, and upper administration.

Phone & Video Call Interview Tips

- **Secure a quiet place** - Make sure you are in an area that will have minimal noise and distraction to ensure you will not be disturbed.
- **Ensure a strong connection** - Make sure you have a strong internet connection or phone reception. Losing connection can be detrimental to the success of the interview.
- **Display a professional image** - Dress in business professional attire, even though you are not meeting with the interviewers in person. If you have a video interview, ensure your background is professional and free of distractions.
- **Demonstrate professionalism** - Make sure your video call profile, voicemail and ring back tone are appropriate.

Before the Interview

- **Research the organization, industry and field to acquire as much information as possible.** This research will help you to ask intelligent questions and determine which of your skills and qualifications to emphasize. Be sure to utilize the company's website to gather important information.

YOUR RESEARCH SHOULD INCLUDE:

- *Mission, vision and values*
- *Major products or services, trends and competitors*
- *Key people in the company and its overall structure*
- *History of the company*
- *Recent news regarding the organization, field or industry*

- **Know your interviewer(s).** Find out in advance the individuals you will be meeting. This may include: human resources staff, the director of the department, department staff, and colleagues. The interviewer may be one of these individuals or a combination. Know your audience and their role in the organization and tailor your responses accordingly.

- **Prepare questions.** During the interview, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions. Type out a list of questions to ask and bring this document to your interview. Asking relevant questions shows interest in the organization and position. Be sure to actively listen so you do not ask a question that has already been discussed.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AN EMPLOYER

What do you like about this position or company?

What do you see as opportunities for growth in this position?

What skills are you looking for in the ideal candidate?

Are there opportunities for community engagement/outreach with the organization?

What does a typical day look like in this position?

What are the opportunities for professional development?

Be sure to ask questions specific to your research on the company.

- **Practice interviewing.** Prepare and practice anticipated questions. Be sure to schedule a mock interview with a Career & Co-op Coordinator in the Career & Experiential Education Center or a professional with interviewing experience.

Types of Interview Questions

OPEN-ENDED

Open-ended questions are vague by design to allow you to elaborate on your skills, qualifications, interests, goals, and background. This allows for the employer to gauge your personality and character traits. Responses should not be lengthy, but should be thorough. Be sure your answers are positive, professional and related to the position.

Examples of open-ended questions:

- *Tell me about yourself.*
- *What are your strengths/weaknesses?*
- *What is your greatest achievement?*
- *Why should we hire you?*
- *What are your long term career goals?*
- *How would a colleague or supervisor describe you?*
- *What do you like most about your current job?*
- *What skills would you bring to this position?*
- *Why did you apply for this job?*

BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEWING

Behavioral Based Interviewing (BBI) is used to predict future performance based on *past* performance. Answering BBI questions effectively is an essential part of the interview process. BBI involves questions that ask for specific examples or details regarding your experience or skills. BBI questions often come in the form of “Tell me about a time when...”, “Give me an example of...”, and “Describe a situation when...”

Tips for Answering BBI Questions

- *Tell a story!*
- *Be specific. Do not be vague or general.*
- *Be careful not to ramble.*
- *Prepare several specific examples that demonstrate your skills and attributes in action.*
- *Use examples from work, academics, extracurricular activities, and community involvement.*
- *Avoid personal stories about family and friend situations.*
- *Refrain from answering with personal feelings or opinions.*
- *Make sure your responses are appropriate and professional.*
- *Practice your BBI responses before the interview.*
- *Use the STAR technique when answering BBI questions.*

STAR TECHNIQUE

Using the STAR technique will aid in developing appropriate responses for behavioral based interviewing questions.

S = Situation - Provide the background of the *situation*

T = Task - State the *task* needed to be accomplished

A = Action - Describe the specific *action* YOU took

R = Result - Provide the *result* you achieved, be sure the result is positive

STAR Technique Example:

QUESTION:

“Describe a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.”

ANSWER:

Situation - When I was elected president of Campus Activities Board at Mount St. Joseph University, I discovered that events were being planned at the last minute. This caused board members to be stressed and events to be poorly executed and attended.

Task - Our club needed to be more organized in order to increase attendance and create successful events.

Action - As president, I developed a retreat at the beginning of each semester to create a calendar of events. During the retreat, we brainstormed event options, as well as marketing strategies. I delegated the coordination of each event to a board member. I made myself available at specific times to provide advice and assistance to board members.

Result - As a result, members planned ahead and provided better marketing for events. Since the events were planned and marketed ahead of time, we had record attendance. My leadership skills proved to assist other members in strengthening their organization, teamwork and communication skills.

Examples of behavioral based interviewing questions:

Tell me about a time when you...

- *Worked effectively under pressure.*
- *Handled a challenging situation with a co-worker.*
- *Were creative in solving a problem.*
- *Collaborated with a team to achieve a goal.*
- *Had to make an important decision.*
- *Had to adapt to a difficult situation.*
- *Demonstrated leadership skills.*
- *Exhibited initiative.*
- *Influenced a group to achieve success.*
- *Failed to achieve a goal.*

- **Dress professionally.** Several days prior to the interview, decide on the professional outfit you will wear. This will allow sufficient time for you to plan an appropriate outfit. When you are neatly groomed and appropriately dressed, you create a favorable impression. The suit is the essential element of the interview attire for men and women alike. Colors such as dark blue, black or gray are considered the most appropriate.

What to Wear to Your Interview!



Professional Hair

Professional and Minimal Jewelry

Coordinating Blouse

Strong Posture

Appropriate Length Skirt

Closed-toe Shoes, Two Inch Heels

Light Make-up

Confident Smile

Well-manicured Nails

Positive and Friendly Attitude

Appropriate, Coordinating Tie

Portfolio

Fresh Haircut

Clean Shaven

Solid Color, Long Sleeve Button-up Shirt

Pressed, Professional Suit

Dark Socks

Polished, Dress Shoes

What **NOT** to Wear to Your Interview!



Contact the Career & Experiential Education Center for assistance in determining if your outfit is appropriate, or if you need professional apparel.

During the Interview

- **Be on time** (10-15 minutes early) - It is crucial to arrive early in order to give yourself ample time to find a parking place and the interview location, as well as, to collect your thoughts before you begin the interview.
- **Handshake** - A firm handshake and a smile will get the interview off to a good start and establish a good first impression of professionalism and confidence.
- **Eye contact** - Be sure to make eye contact with the interviewer(s) throughout the interview to show you are interested and to develop rapport.
- **Non-verbals** - Be aware of your posture, facial expressions, and hand gestures. Avoid distracting habits such as repetitive leg movements, yawning, and adjusting hair or clothing. Be sure to show that you are attentively listening by occasionally nodding your head.
- **Exhibit confidence** - Utilize good communication skills and demonstrate confidence in your answers by eliminating “um,” “ah,” “like,” and “you know” from your responses.
- **Think before you speak** - It is better to have a few moments of silence than stumbling through your answer. Stop and think about what you are saying, and use that time to properly articulate your response.

INTERVIEW STAGES

Most interviews follow a fairly predictable pattern, particularly if they are conducted by someone experienced in interviewing.

1. INTRODUCTIONS

This is an informal conversation on general topics between two people who have just met. Small talk is designed to make the candidate comfortable and more likely to provide the necessary information to the interviewer. This is also a time for the interviewer to gauge your interpersonal skills. Try to be calm, cordial and engaged, while remaining professional.

2. OPENING QUESTIONS (5-10 MINUTES)

The interviewer may ask open-ended questions about your education, experiences or other items noted on your resume, giving you an opportunity to expand on your skills and qualifications. This is an opportunity for you to utilize your 30 second introduction.

3. IN-DEPTH QUESTIONS (15-20 MINUTES)

Typically, these questions are behavioral based interviewing questions, where you will provide specific examples. This is your opportunity to demonstrate how you will benefit the company and how your skills, interests and abilities match the job for which you are interviewing. Be sure to use the STAR technique.

4. YOUR QUESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

This is the time for you to ask questions. You should always have questions prepared prior to your interview, utilizing your research. You should not ask questions about salary or benefits. Remember to listen carefully to avoid asking something that has already been discussed. Your questions demonstrate that you are interested and have done your “homework.”

5. CLOSING

Follow-up- Do not forget to ask, “When should I expect to hear from you?” This will ensure you know when to follow-up with the employer. Get a business card or contact information for all of the employees that interviewed you. You will need this information when writing your thank you letters.

Reiterate your interest in the position- Summarize how you can be an asset to the company and express your interest in this position. Examples:

“I am really interested in this position and working with your organization. I believe that my communication and problem solving skills would be an asset to your team.”

“This job sounds perfect for my skills and experience. I'd really like to work with your organization and utilize my attention to detail and organizational skills.”

“I believe my education and understanding of technology will be a great asset to your organization. I am excited about the possibility of joining your team.”

Thank the interviewer- Address them by name (Ms./Mrs./Mr./Dr. _____). Express your appreciation to the interviewer(s) for their time and mention you look forward to hearing from them.

After the Interview

- **Thank you** - Send your interviewer(s) an e-mail or hand-written card to express appreciation for their time and consideration within 24-48 hours.
- **Evaluate** - Assess your performance objectively and look for ways to improve for future interviews.
- **Follow-up** - Complete any instructions the interviewer(s) may have requested, such as submitting references or obtaining a background check.

If the employer has not contacted you within the timeframe stated in the interview, follow-up with the employer to reiterate your interest and ask the status of the selection process.

Only contact the company once.

EXAMPLE FOLLOW-UP CALL:

"I am calling to let you know I am still interested in the (position title) position, for which I interviewed on (date). During my interview, I was energized to learn about the opportunities at your organization. (You may want to provide specific examples.) I wanted to inquire about the hiring status. Please let me know if additional information about my qualifications is needed. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you."

Interview Checklist

GENERAL PREPARATION

- Familiarize yourself with the general format of interviews
- Practice answers to typical interview questions
- Prepare questions you will ask the interviewer(s)
- Know the name and title of the interviewer(s)
- Know precisely where to go for the interview and arrive 10-15 minutes early (Hint: If you have never been there, make a dry run the day before.)
- Determine and organize a professional outfit, preferably a suit

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORGANIZATION

- Familiarize yourself with major products, services and main competitors of the organization
- Know the mission, vision, values, and history of the organization
- Research the latest news reports about the company
- Research the current economic outlook of the company

WHAT TO BRING TO THE INTERVIEW

- Several copies of your resume and list of references on professional resume paper
- Dates, names, addresses, etc., concerning previous jobs and education
- Pen and paper for note taking
- Padfolio to hold resumes and paper
- Money for parking
- Portfolio of artwork, writing samples, or any other visual examples of your work, if appropriate

Special thanks to:

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& **co-ops**



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