

An interview is:

- A dialogue in which you and the employer can meet each other, share information and come to a tentative conclusion about the “match” that may exist between you and the available position.
- An opportunity for you to make an oral presentation of your qualifications, which allows you to highlight your strengths.
- One of the last and often most important steps in the hiring process. Whenever you are invited for an interview, ask who you will be meeting and how much time should be set aside.
- A two-way process. The employer is provided an opportunity to assess how well you communicate, how well qualified you are for the position and your level of motivation. You as a candidate should be attempting to identify whether or not you would want to work for the organization.
- An opportunity to learn more about yourself, the working world and the types of positions or organizations that match your needs and skills.
- Remember that an employer is using the interview to evaluate the total you. This includes your attitude, appearance, confidence, level of preparedness, knowledge of yourself, knowledge of the position and organization and your ability to successfully perform the duties of the position.

### TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are many different types of interviews, but most will last 30–60 minutes and follow a similar format:

1. Introductory exchange/small talk
2. Mutual discussion of your background and qualifications as related to the employer’s needs
3. Time for your questions
4. Information about the next steps in the process

### Screening Interviews

With large organizations, the first interview may be conducted by a human resources specialist. The screening interview is generally quite short and often takes place via phone or Skype. Its purpose is to screen out those applicants who are clearly not qualified. The interview will consist of probing questions to determine your technical competence and open ended questions to assess your ability to communicate on your feet. While the emphasis is on technical competence, they will also screen out those whose personalities clearly would not fit in the organization’s culture. Be sure to sell yourself. If you do well, you will likely be invited for a second interview.

### Phone or Skype Interviews

Telephone or Skype interviews are often a form of a screening interview. See pages 42–43 for more information about phone etiquette. In addition to the tips for general interviews, here are some tips on phone interviews:

- **Use a landline if possible.** Landlines are less likely to drop calls and are clearer than cell phones. The interview room in Career Services is equipped with a landline as well as a computer. Call 920-832-6561 to reserve the room when setting up your phone interview. If you must use a cell phone, make sure it is fully charged and that you are in a location with good reception.
- **Consider your surroundings.** Take the call in a place where you will be uninterrupted. Avoid public places. Let your roommates know that you will be on an important call so they can plan ahead. Be aware of the background if you will be using Skype—a blank wall is best, to avoid distractions. You can reserve an interview room in Career Services for Skype interviews too.

- **Consider time.** Find out how long the call is expected to last. Allocate an additional 30 minutes beyond this time, just in case the interview goes long. Be ready to answer the phone 10 minutes ahead of schedule, in case the interviewer calls early. Keep time zones in mind as well. Will the employer be calling at 1 p.m. their time or your time?
- **Use notes.** (Only for phone interviews). Since the interviewer can't see you, feel free to lay out notes about the organization as well as the skills and experience you want to highlight. Print a copy of your résumé and the job description as well.
- **Answer the phone with your name.** Providing your name makes it clear that the interviewer is speaking to the correct person. You could say *Hello, Jordan Heitt speaking* or *Good morning/afternoon, this is Jordan Heitt.*
- **Smile.** When you smile, you sound optimistic and pleasant. This demonstrates professionalism and positivity.
- **Sit up.** Good posture helps you stay alert and professional.
- **Dress up.** Even though the interviewer can't see you (or all of you), dressing up can help you get into the right frame of mind. You know what they say, "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have."
- **Be aware of pauses.** Because the interviewer may not be able to see you, he/she cannot take cues from your body language as to whether you have paused momentarily or have completed an answer. If you pause too long, the interviewer might think they lost the connection!
- **Get the name and contact info of the interviewer(s).** This will allow you to followup with a thank you note. It will also help you identify your interviewer(s) should you have the opportunity to meet them face-to-face.

### Panel Interviews

In the panel interview, two or more people interview you simultaneously, usually taking turns asking questions. You may be interviewed by multiple individuals who have their own separate agendas. In a panel interview, you will often find that the only person really listening to your answer may be the person who asked it. Make each member feel totally involved in the interview by looking at each person while you are responding to questions.

### Series Interviews

The series interview consists of consecutive one-on-one interviews with different people in the organization, all in one day. The interviewers may include someone from human resources, the person to whom you will be reporting, two or three people who will be your colleagues in the same department or someone from a different department. The assumption behind series interviews is that several people's perspectives are better than one. After the series of interviews, the interviewers meet to discuss each candidate. There might not be agreement on the best candidate, but there is likely to be strong agreement on the finalists. The actual hiring manager will usually select one of them.

The key point in series interviewing is that you know in advance that it will be happening. You need to muster lots of energy to go through a series interview. Oftentimes, the same or very similar questions are asked in each interview, so be prepared to repeat yourself.

## PREPARE AND PRACTICE

The key to success in any interview is preparation! It is important that you know as much as possible about the position for which you are applying and the organization with which you are interviewing. Preparation also means knowing yourself. You will be expected to articulate your goals, values, interests and skills.

### Interview Basics

- Be certain of the time and place of the interview.
- Arrive for your appointment at least ten minutes early.
- Know the name, role and level of responsibility of each individual with whom you are to meet.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- Wait for the interviewer to be seated or to offer you a chair before sitting. If there are several chairs to choose from, select the chair in which you can directly face the interviewer.
- Maintain eye contact without staring.
- Body language is important. Posture should be erect, relaxed and open. Your hands should be used in a natural way that expresses animation, excitement and interest. Facial expressions should convey your sincerity and voice tone should be warm, well-modulated and relaxed.
- Keep the interviewer's attention. Do not ramble or include trivia in your responses. Answer in complete sentences and avoid use of slang.
- The interviewer controls the flow of the conversation, but you control the content; gently lead the conversation to highlight your strengths.
- Do not ask about salary and benefits unless the interviewer brings it up.
- If you need clarification on a question, ask for it.
- Use specific, concrete examples and refer to your accomplishments and strengths.
- Be prepared with your own questions.
- Always be courteous, sincere and honest. Do not criticize or put down previous employers, colleagues or supervisors. Provide positive examples focusing on your strengths.

### What to Bring

- Name and title of the interviewer(s)
- Padfolio/Folder
- Pen/pencil
- Copies of your résumé
- List of your references
- Samples of your work or portfolio (if required)
- Copy of the position description
- Business cards

## Research the Position and Organization

Thoroughly research the organization, career field, issues and trends related to the type of work you would be doing and be prepared to “speak the language” of the professionals who work in the field.

Here are some suggestions on what to research about the organization:

- Function and size
- Potential for growth or expansion
- Products and services
- Reputation
- Mission or values statement
- Location of its facilities
- Organizational structure
- Financial stability
- Clients it serves
- Opportunities for training
- Competitors
- Relocation policies
- Typical entry-level positions
- Typical salary ranges for your desired position

Where to find this information:

- The organization’s website
- People in the field
- Alumni employed by the organization
- LinkedIn
- GlassDoor.com
- Facebook
- Organization literature
- Public and career libraries
- Chambers of commerce
- Trade journals
- Newsletters
- Business magazines and associations
- Directories

**You are strongly encouraged to practice interviewing with a Career Services staff member prior to an actual interview so that you can improve your interviewing techniques and become familiar with the “feel” of an interview situation.**

## KNOW YOURSELF

You should be prepared to discuss what you can offer the organization as well as your reasons for wanting to work for that particular employer. Prior to the interview, analyze your strengths and weaknesses and know exactly what you want to say (and what you don't want to say) during the interview. Evaluate problem areas in your background and be prepared to offer a positive explanation of these in case they are brought up. See the exercise below to help you prepare.

### Know Yourself Exercise

**Interests:** What types of tasks excite you? What types of tasks bore/frustrate you?

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**Abilities:** What skills do you have? Which ones are you willing to learn or improve for the job?

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**Education:** How have courses, degrees or certifications prepared you?

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**Experience:** How has previous full-time, part-time, freelance, volunteer or other work prepared you?

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**Values:** What basic attitudes do you have toward work, other people, yourself and the world?

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**Strengths:** What are you good at?

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**Goals:** What are your short-term and long-term employment goals?

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**Weaknesses:** What can you improve in order to become a better employee?

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## WHAT TO WEAR

The type of dress that is appropriate varies according to the type of position and organization with which you interview. Dress as it appears others in this type of position or organization dress. You should wear the same type of attire for screening interviews as you would for on-site interviews.

- In fields such as banking, sales, management and insurance, a conservative suit (i.e. navy or gray, solid or pinstripe) is appropriate.
- In fields such as retail, merchandising and advertising, a more colorful and stylish suit is acceptable.
- Less formal attire is worn for social service, education, IT and arts-related positions. Men can wear dress pants, shirt, jacket and tie; women can wear a skirt or dress pants, blouse and blazer or a dress with jacket.
- Be sure your shoes are polished, hair is neatly combed and make-up, jewelry and cologne are not excessive or distracting.

**Remember: The way you dress contributes to an employer's first impression of you and suggests the image you might present on the job if you are hired.**

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Below are some common questions to help you practice for your interview. Keep in mind that this list is not comprehensive and you may be asked other questions during your interview. It is also a good idea to do some research to find questions specific to your field or the position for which you are applying. One helpful resource is [glassdoor.com](http://glassdoor.com). Career Services and Lawrence Alumni in your field are other great resources!

### Personal

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would a friend/professor/supervisor describe you?
- What are your greatest strengths?
- What would you say is an area in which you need improvement?
- What are your qualifications for this position?
- Why should we hire you instead of another qualified candidate?
- What else should I know about you?

### Education-Related

- What college subjects did you like best? Least?
- If you had the chance to repeat your college career, what would you do differently? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- How has your education prepared you for this job?
- Do you have plans to continue your education?

### Problem-Solving

- Describe a time you felt under pressure and how you handled it.
- Describe the last time you made a mistake. How did you deal with it?
- How will you prepare for the transition from college to the workplace?

### Decision-Making

- Why did you decide to attend Lawrence University?
- What led you to choose your major?
- Why did you choose to enter this occupational field?

### Teamwork

- What have you learned from participating in extra-curricular activities?

### Thinking on Your Feet

- What was the last book you read/movie you saw?
- Define teamwork/success, etc.
- If you could be a type of fruit, what kind would you be and why?

### Work-Related

- Describe an ideal work environment.
- Tell me about your part-time or summer jobs.
- How was your relationship with your past supervisor?
- How has your experience prepared you for a job with this organization?
- What did you enjoy most from your last job? Least?
- What did you learn from your most recent job?
- Do you prefer to work with others or alone?
- What kind of supervision style do you prefer?

### Future Plans

- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- What are your long and short-term career goals?
- How will this position fit with your long-term career goals?

### Organization

- What do you know about our organization?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
- In what ways can you contribute to our organization?
- How long do you plan to stay with our organization?
- What salary range do you anticipate for this position?

### Behavioral

Behavioral interviewing is a questioning technique that asks the interviewee to give real-world examples of how you have handled specific events and challenges in your academics or the workplace. You will be asked to provide evidence that you have the skills required for the position. Behavioral interviewing is based on the belief that past behavior predicts future performance. Using the STAR technique will help you highlight relevant pieces of your example and give structure to your answer.

## STAR TECHNIQUE

**Situation:** Describe a specific situation.

**Task:** Describe the problem that needed to be solved or the task that needed to be completed.

**Action:** Explain the steps taken to complete the task and the skills used. Be sure to keep the focus on you, even if you are discussing a group project.

**Results:** What happened? How did the situation end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

### Tips for the STAR Technique

- Come up with three to five different situations that could answer a few of the questions below. Practice talking through these situations. This way, you will have a bank of a few situations to choose from, rather than every situation you have ever experienced and you'll know what to say.
- Don't forget the RESULTS part of STAR! Your interviewers will want to know how your story ends.
- Practice, practice, practice! Have a friend ask you some questions, practice in front of the mirror, write out your answers and don't forget to make an appointment for a mock interview with Career Services.

### Sample Questions

- Describe the biggest challenge you've had in your last job or internship and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you do this?
- Give us an example of a situation in which you had to use your leadership skills.
- Summarize a situation where you had to generate a new idea or suggestion at work or school and tell me about how you got this idea implemented.
- How have you most constructively dealt with disappointment?
- Describe a situation where you had to work with a difficult boss, professor or co-worker. How did you successfully interact with this person?
- Can you recall a time when you delivered more than was expected of you?
- Tell me about a time when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give us an example of how you handle it.
- Have you had a chance to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
- Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job and tell me how you solved it.
- Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or coworker.
- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- Tell me about a time when you made a poor decision and how you corrected it.
- Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team and one team member wasn't carrying his/her weight.



## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE EMPLOYER

- What are the most important duties of the position?
- What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
- What are the challenging facets of the job? What are the top three challenges I will face in this job?
- How would you describe a typical day in this position?
- How much travel is normally experienced?
- How much evening or weekend work is expected?
- What kind of training is given to new employees?
- Are there opportunities for additional training?
- Is this a new position? How did the opening for which I am applying occur?
- What is the career path for this position?
- If I work hard and prove my value to the company, where might I find myself in five years?
- How and how often are performance reviews given?
- Outside my department, who else will I work with?
- Are transfer (overseas) opportunities available?
- What sort of management style is used within this organization?
- What do you like most/least about working here?
- What is the environment in the office like?
- Do employees tend to socialize with each other outside of work?
- How do you feel my style will complement the team culture?
- What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
- Will I be working on projects individually or part of a team?
- To what extent will I be responsible for determining my work objectives?
- What are your growth projections for the next year? What are the organization's plans for future growth?
- What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the largest problem facing your department at this time?
- Does the organization support membership and participation in professional organizations?
- What are the next steps of the hiring process? What is your timeline for completing the hiring process? When might I expect to hear from you about the position? (Ask one of these questions at the end if the interviewer has not already covered this topic).

## DURING

A typical interview will progress through the following steps:

### Initial Greeting

The first impression is very important. Be ready to make eye contact, offer a firm handshake and call the interviewer by name (using Mr. or Ms.).

### Icebreaker

The interviewer may attempt to relax the candidate by making small talk and establishing rapport. You might comment on some things in their office (trophy, painting, etc.) or perhaps the building or office space.

### About You

One of the most common interview questions is along the lines of “Tell me about yourself.” A good way to approach this question is to talk about your present, your past and your future, as it relates to the position for which you are interviewing.

1. **Present:** Where are you now? School, location, graduation date, degree, majors/minors, internships/jobs.
2. **Past:** Where have you been? Work, internships, leadership experience, volunteer activities, study abroad.
3. **Future:** Where are you going? How can you be of assistance to their organization?

### Career Interests and Goals

You will almost certainly be asked to explain your interest in the position, organization and career field. In addition, you may be asked to articulate your short and long-term goals. This is where your preparation will help you display well-designed, mature and realistic career plans. If your career goals are inconsistent with the organization’s needs and interests, you will most likely be screened out.

### Your Qualifications

To determine your qualifications, an employer will be looking for tangible results or achievements in work experiences, academic endeavors, community activities and leadership positions. Be prepared to give specific examples using positive action verbs emphasizing your accomplishments.

### “What-if” Scenarios

The interviewer might pose a hypothetical situation and ask you to role-play your response to the problem. While it is difficult to plan for every possible situation, you can be prepared for this type of question and accept it as a challenge rather than displaying panic and uncertainty.

### Organization Information

You may be asked what you know about the organization. Therefore, once again, researching the organization prior to your interview is extremely important. The interviewer will probably spend some time talking about the position and the organization. If you find yourself with a recruiter who talks continually, you will need to find a way to politely interject your own comments and highlight your interest in the position.

## Your Questions

Most experienced interviewers allow time for your questions and you should have some prepared ahead of time. The interviewer does not want to answer questions that are covered on the organization's website, so be certain you have reviewed it carefully. Also, it is generally inappropriate to ask about benefits and salary during the screening interview, since you want to appear interested in the work itself, rather than the compensation and benefits package. See page 65 for sample questions.

## Unethical Interview Questions

**Questions involving religion, age, sex, marital status, credit rating, political affiliation, birthplace, national origin and sexual orientation are unethical to ask during an interview. If you are asked a question that you think is illegal, you have the right to refuse to answer or you may decide to answer the question, despite your unease. Either choice is acceptable and there is no right way to answer an unethical question.**

## The Closing

Although the interviewer should take the initiative to end the discussion, you should watch for clues that indicate the interview is over. If the interviewer does not tell you what the next step in the process will be, ASK. Finally, reaffirm your interest in the position and organization and reiterate your qualifications for the job. Make a strong summary statement that repeats your interest and strengths. Thank the interviewer for his/her time.

## AFTER

First and foremost, send a thank you note to each person with whom you interviewed. More information about thank you notes can be found on page 53. Here are some other steps to take following the interview:

### Analyze Your Performance

As soon as you return home, think about what went well during the interview and what you need to continue to work on. Make a list of the questions that stumped you or that you had a difficult time answering. Practice your answers to those questions with a friend, in front of a mirror, film yourself on your phone or make an appointment to practice with a career advisor to get additional tips and advice.

### Status and Feedback

If you have not heard from the organization within the period indicated by the interviewer, you may wish to call to inquire about the status of your candidacy. If after a second (or third) interview, you are not offered the position, it may be acceptable for you to ask for feedback about your qualifications and their reasons for not hiring you. This will help you prepare for the next interview.

### Don't "Jump the Gun"

It is usually best not to accept a job offer on the spot. State your interest and appreciation of the offer and request a reasonable amount of time to consider it (usually a few days or a week). Be sure to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it. Once you have accepted a position, your commitment is considered binding.